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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

"Not One, But . . . So Entwined": Man and Nature in the Early Poetry of Yvor Winters

by

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A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS.

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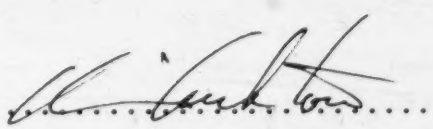

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptence, a thesis entitled "Not One, But . . . So Entwined": Man and Nature in the Early Poetry of Yvor Winters" submitted by Chris Carleton in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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H. W. Connor

W. E. Cooper

Date: August 29, 1989

To my wife and parents

ABSTRACT

In this thesis I mainly examine Yvor Winters' early nature poetry in the context in which he wrote, Imagism. In chapter 1, I discuss Imagist theory, its limitations, strengths, and suitability for the subject of nature. The second chapter concerns Winters' first volume of poetry, The Immobile Wind. This volume is mainly examined as Winters' attempt to explore man's relationship to nature with as yet undeveloped Imagist techniques. The third chapter examines the relationship between American Indian poetry and Winters' second volume, The Magpie's Shadow, in an Imagist context. This volume is rather slight, but it does offer a few concise examples of Imagist poetry. The main topic of the fourth chapter is Winters' development of Imagist theory in his essay "A Testament of a Stone" and the extent to which developing Imagist principles exposed their limitations. In the fifth chapter I examine Winters' growing dissatisfaction with, as well as his more sophisticated use of, Imagist principles in his third volume, The Immobile Wind. Here we see Winters beginning to reach the limits of Imagism; these limits are further explored in the sixth chapter, which concerns his fourth volume, The Proof, and his later poetry. Although Winters' rejected Imagism's forms and underlying beliefs in his later career, he did not reject all of its principles. Winters' later poetry is indebted to Imagism's emphasis on accurate observation, and I briefly examine his use of the image in a later poem. More importantly, Imagism likely informs one of

Winters' most important critical statements and poetic techniques, his description and use of the post-symbolist method. My final chapter ends with a brief re-examination of Imagism's limitations, and Winters' movement away from Imagism as it begins early in his career and eventually ends with his adoption of traditional poetic forms, techniques, and values. Among the Imagists, this movement, I conclude, is only found in Winters.

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I. Introduction

Yvor Winters' early poetry, from his first volume, The Immobile Wind (1921), up to and including the first third of The Proof (1930), was heavily influenced by the Imagist movement,[1] but this influence has not been given the direct and thorough attention it deserves. Studies of his early poems tend to emphasize their implicit metaphysical problems, and how Winters' dissatisfaction with Imagism and free verse led him to traditional forms of English poetry. These studies have greatly improved our understanding of Winters' poetry[2] but have not closely examined his early poetry in the context of Imagist theory.

Imagist theory, of course, is often confusing, even contradictory. John T. Gage, in In the Arresting Eye: The Rhetoric of Imagism, has gone as far as to say that the

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[1] In his Introduction to The Early Poems Winters states that his introduction to poetry came through magazines in which Imagist poetry and theory was often published, Poetry, The Little Review, and Others. He also read "a fair number of books by Yeats, Pound, Williams, and other moderns" (The Early Poems of Yvor Winters 1920-28 [Chicago: Alan Swallow Press, 1966] 8).

[2] Two of the best studies of Winters' early poetry are Grosvenor Powell's Language as Being in the Poetry of Yvor Winters (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), and Terry Comitio's In Defense of Winters: The Poetry and Prose of Yvor Winters (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1986). Both are concerned with Winters' entire career, however, and sometimes tend to view his early poetry as a problem he later overcame, rather than closely examining the style, organizing principles, content, and achievement of the poetry itself. Of course examining Winters' break from Imagism is very important for any serious study of his early poetry; I simply attempt to give the study an Imagist emphasis.

impossiblity of writing poetry based on Imagist theory prevented the Imagist poet from living up to his own ideals.[3] A critical study of Imagist theory, however, will show that its original principles concerning style, content, and organizing principle, though severely limiting, offered more to the Imagist poet than he usually accomplished. Grosvenor Powell claims that Winters used the techniques of Imagism "with a seriousness beyond the capacity of their more enthusiastic advocates."[4] I think this claim is valid, but it warrants a close examination of Imagist theory and the degree to which Winters' early poetry fulfills its demands.

An appropriate place to begin is the three original principles Pound, Richard Aldington, and H. D. agreed on in the spring or early summer of 1912. They originally appeared in Poetry in 1913 and were submitted by F. S. Flint as follows:

> 1. Direct treatment of the "thing," whether subjective or objective.
> 2. To use absolutely no word that did not contribute to the presentation.
> 3. As regarding rhythm: to compose in sequence of the musical phrase, not in the sequence of the metronome.[5]

The first two principles concern style but do not offer anything that poets have not been striving for since the beginning of time, or as Terry Comito says, "What poet has not wanted to deal

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[3] John T. Gage, In the Arresting Eye: The Rhetoric of Imagism (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981) 56.
[4] Language as Being 102.
[5] Ezra Pound, "A Retrospect," Literary Essays of Ezra Pound ed. by T. S. Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 1963) 3.

directly with his subject? Who has praised useless verbiage?"[6] The third is a defintion of free verse, and the study of free verse is, as Winters later described it, "arduous and on the face of it is not particularly tempting: there are so many other things that one can do instead."[7] My main concern here is to determine what the principles of Imagism impose on the content of poetry, though I will not be able to avoid some discussion of free verse as a form.

"The direct treatment of the 'thing,' whether objective or subjective" is confusing for several reasons. "Thing" is a much too general term, and whether objectivity or subjectivity is of greater value and what relationship between the two is desirable are not established. "Thing" seems to mean anything from a balloon tangled in a ship's mast (Hulme's "Above the Dock") to a Greek God (H. D.'s "Hermes of the Ways"). As for objective or subjective, a simple definition of these terms is helpful: objective can be understood as referring to that which is external to the mind; subjective as referring to that which has its source in the mind, either emotion or thought. Some Imagist poems seem to be wholly objective, such as Pound's "Ts'ai Chi'h":

> The petals fall in the fountain
> the orange coloured rose-leaves,
> Their ochre clings to the stone.[8]

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[6] Defense of Winters 38.

[7] Yvor Winters, In Defense of Reason (Denver: Alan Swallow Press, 1947) 104.

[8] Ezra Pound, "Ts'ai Chi'h," Imagist Poetry, ed. Peter Jones (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985) 95.

Of course, some subjectivity is present: a vague appreciation of what is really quite a beautiful scene. The poet does not describe the scene in detail, but at least his emotional response does not cloud what description there is.

Yet Pound's "Ts'ai Chi'h" is precise indeed when compared with Imagist poems that tend to be wholly subjective. The much derided Skipwith Cannell offers a good example of the subjective extreme in "Nocturnes" VI:

> I am weary with *longing*,
> I am faint with love;
> For upon my head has the moonlight
> Fallen
> As a sword.[9]

The poem first establishes a mood of unrequited love then offers a private, emotionally tainted impression of moonlight. In this poem the subjective response is primarily an emotional one, but, we must remember, abstract thought also arises from the mind and can, therefore, be considered subjective. Yet Pound scorned abstractions in his first Imagist manifesto: "Go in fear of abstractions."[10] He presented a specific example of the improper use of the abstract: "Don't use such an expression as 'dim land of peace.' It dulls the image. It mixes an abstraction with the concrete."[11] A more important problem with the example, however, is that it is vague. Nevertheless, Pound's intention, and it is a good one, is simply to demand a precise and economic poetic

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9 Imagist Poetry 59.
10 Literary Essays 5.
11 Literary Essays 5.

style. Yet, if poetry is to be anything but pure description of an object, or primarily emotional response, some abstract thought must be included, and, as Grosvenor Powell notes, Pound's maxim on abstractions contradicts his definition of the image as an "emotional and intellectual complex in an instant of time."[12]

Contradictions aside, Pound's definition of the image, in the same 1913 issue of Poetry, does offer a principle for the subjective content of Imagist poetry:

> An "Image" is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time. I use the term "complex" rather in the technical sense employed by the newer psychologists, such as Hart, though we might not agree absolutely in our application.[13]

He does not explain the relationship between intellectual and emotional content, but the psychological term "complex" at least gives a sense of what kind of content should be included in the image:

> [a complex is defined as] a group of emotionally charged ideas or mental factors, unconsciously associated by the individual with a particular subject, arising from repressed instincts, fears, or desires and often resulting in mental abnormality.[14]

Pound would not agree that the complex should be "unconsciously" associated with a subject by the reader, although he does say that one should "drift into a certain vein of thought" to make his "In a Station at the Metro" meaningful; he may, therefore, be

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12 Language as Being 81.
13 Literary Essays 4.
14 Taken from the 1987 supplement to the Oxford English Dictionary 150.

implying a relaxation of consciousness. Nor would he agree that a poetic complex results in mental abnormality, although there were a surprising number of Imagists with mental problems. Nevertheless, the idea of a "complex" offers a strong criterion for subject matter: the subject chosen must embody emotionally charged ideas. Indeed, this is a good criterion for any poetry. Imagism goes further, however, in specifying that the emotionally charged ideas are presented in "an instant of time." Therefore, the extended temporal sequence implicit in discursive thought that leads to a moral conclusion is not possible, and this restriction constitutes the principal limitation of Imagism and its distinction from traditional poetry. Still, Pound's definition of the image does emphasize the importance of emotional and intellectual content and attempts to invest Imagist poetry with something more than pure objectivism.

In his 1914 essay "Vorticism," Pound described an organizing principle that orders objective and subjective treatment. He defines the "one image poem" as "trying to record the precise instant when a thing outward transforms itself, or darts into a thing inward and subjective."[15] Pound implies a limited temporal sequence: the Imagist poem records sensation then the emotions and thoughts concerning the sensation that follow shortly afterwards. Hence thought and emotion should be given a context in sense perception, or in Imagist terms, the "complex"

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15 Ezra pound "Vorticism," Fortnightly Review, n.s. 96 (1914) 467.

is given a context in sense perception. Pound's example of a "one image poem," "In a Station at the Metro," makes this organizing principle and its temporal sequence clear: "The apparition of these faces in the crowd;/ Petals on a wet, black bough."[16] The poem seems to be an implied simile; Pound certainly places it in the context of the Japanese hokku in which a comparison using the word "like" is implied but not stated. The speaker of Pound's poem is in an underground train station, sees a crowd of people, a sense perception, and compares them to "petals on a wet, black bough," a thought-perception.[17] The poem also generates a mood, but one should first examine the poem's objective content.

The first line is either objective and offers no "complex," or it is subjective and offers a strong "complex." If, by "apparition," Pound simply means that the crowd's appearence

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16 Imagist Poetry 95.

17 Winters makes a distinction between "sense perception" and "thought perception" that is useful in understanding the outward "thing" and inward "thing" in Pound's definition of the "one image poem":

> Perceptions which are expressed in the meaning of words may be called "meaning perceptions." They fall roughly into two classes: perceptions of concrete facts of which one becomes aware through the simple senses, and which may be called "sense perceptions"; and perceptions of abstract facts or qualities--that is, of facts or qualities which are imperceptible to the unaided senses--of which one becomes aware through thinking about a concrete or abstract fact, and which may be called "thought-perceptions" ("The Testament of a Stone," The Uncollected Essays and Reviews of Yvor Winters, ed. Francis Murphy [Chicago: The Swallow Press Inc., 1973] 201).

surprised him, then the poem is mostly objective and does not contain "emotionally charged ideas." Pound's inspiration for the poem supports this sense of "apparition":

> Three years ago in Paris I got out of a "metro" train at La Concorde, and saw suddenly [my emphasis] a beautiful face, and then another and another, and then a beautiful child's face, and then another beautiful woman.[18]

Yet "apparition," in its most common usage, has strong connotations of the supernatural. The underground setting is appropriate for a ghostly scene and would seem to allude to the many classical myths of the underworld, even though he does not mention the allusion in the "Vorticism" essay. In support of this definition, we note that Pound began writing the Cantos at this time (1913), the first of which concerns Odysseus' visit to the underworld. Moreover, in order to present intensely "an emotional and intellectual complex in an instant of time" "apparition" must have some suggestive power. Yet this use of the word implies that the speaker's response was subjective rather than objective: he thought the crowd appeared ghostly. The first line is not a sense perception that generates thought but, rather, a private impression. Pound seems to be deliberately ambiguous in his use of the word "apparition" in order to capture an instant of simultaneous objective and subjective experience, but in doing so he dulls the inspiring sense perception. As Kenneth Fields says, the observation "is

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18 "Vorticism" 465.

not really very sharp."[19]

The first line's allusion to the underworld does effectively generate a mood, but the second line seems to contradict it. The underworld motif appeals to a fundamental human emotion: the fear of death is like the fear of being underground (both fears are nearly universal). The second line's flower petals seem to be detached and would, therefore, also imply death. Flower petals usually give pleasure, however, and Pound may be suggesting a relationship between beauty and death. The underworld motif certainly embodies intellectual content in presenting a way of understanding death: the subterranean world is fundamentally different from the terrestial world, just as death is fundamentally different from life.

As one attempts to examine the intellectual content of the poem, however, one finds only vague suggestion. Much of the intellectual content is found in the allusion to Odysseus' visit to the underworld. This allusion implies, though only slightly, the range of moral problems that Odysseus himself faced in consulting Tiresias about his future, as well as the wrongs suffered by the many shades paraded before him. Yet what part of Odysseus' visit to the underworld is significant or what importance it has for modern man is not made clear. Perhaps, the emotional response to a subway may intimate the kind of emotional response one would expect to have in visiting the underworld, but

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19 Kenneth Fields, The Rhetoric of Artifice, diss., Stanford University, 1967 (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, Inc., 1978) 91.

our understanding of subways and the underworld is not significantly deepened by a similarity of emotional responses. The poem may also suggest something about the degraded condition of modern man: he travels in what was once considered the realm of the dead, and he even looks like the dead when he is underground. The significance of modern man's relationship to underground train travel, however, is not elaborated on. In short, the allusion, by its very nature, is indirect and contradicts Pound's stylistic maxim to treat directly the "thing"; whatever implications the poem has for modern man are also only indirectly suggested; finally, in suggesting the "complex" in the speaker's initial observation, the poem's objective treatment is weakened and rendered impressionistic.

The strength of Pound's definition of the "one image poem" is its suggestion of an organizing principle. The ideal Imagist poem, a poem that incorporates all of Imagism's basic principles, could be summarized as that which precisely describes the instant when sense perception is given an emotional and intellectual context. In addition, a good Imagist poet would choose a subject in which "emotionally charged ideas" are apparent, but controllable, in order to present that subject precisely and economically. "In a Station at the Metro" contains emotionally charged ideas, but at the expense of precise subjective treatment. The poem's "complex" is so wide ranging that it becomes vague, lacking both the precision and economy the Imagists strived for. One might argue, as Pound did, that one

can be "wholly precise in representing vagueness,"[20] but doing so implies a direct treatment of the subject of vagueness, not simply being vague about other subjects. Indeed, if the precise description of the sense perception does not clearly imply a specific emotional and intellectual context, then precision in the subjective description will not be possible. Given that the poem attempts to describe "an instant of time," some vagueness is inevitable; however, some subjects are more adapted to Imagism than others. Allusion contradicts the stylistic maxim to treat directly the "thing," and it goes beyond the confines of "an instant of time" by mixing the immediate present with the past. Hence ideal Imagist subject matter would contain an accurate sense perception which generates thought and emotion, rather than a sense perception blurred by allusion and private impression.

One subject that seems appropriate for Imagist treatment is man's relationship to the natural world. Yet very few Imagists, Winters excepted, wrote poetry about nature, likely because they were opposed, in subject and technique, to the Romantics and their less skilled followers. Pound believed Wordsworth's technique was sentimental and as a consequence his subject was treated imprecisely:

> He was a silly old sheep with a genius, an unquestionable genius, for imagisme, for a presentation of natural detail, wildfowl bathing in a hole in the ice, etc., and this talent, or the fruits of this talent, he buried in a desert of bleatings.[21]

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20 Literary Essays 44.
21 Literary Essays 277.

Yet for Wordsworth the goal of poetry was not simply to describe objectively his subject, but instead, to "throw over them [situations from common life] a certain colouring of the imagination."[22] This "certain colouring of the imagination" emphasized "feelings" which gave "importance to the action and situation, and not the action and situation to the feeling."[23] For Wordsworth, perception was subordinate to emotion. In contrast, Pound believed that "the natural object . . . [was] always the adequate symbol."[24] That is, perception of the natural object alone could carry powerful suggestion without the poet explicitly suggesting appropriate emotions and thoughts concerning the object.

Placing these theories in the context of nature poetry, we can understand Wordsworth's technique as emphasizing the feelings associated with a natural scene over description of the scene itself, and Winters' Imagist technique as emphasizing objective description of the scene over emotions which may be implicit in that description. Wordsworth and the Romantics effectively described the joy at being one with nature, as well as the regret over being unable to achieve that feeling of oneness. Winters'

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22 William Wordsworth, "Preface to the Second Edition of the Lyrical Ballads," English Romantic Writers, ed. David Perkins (Toronto: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, Publishers, 1967) 321.

23 "Preface" 321.

24 Literary Essays 5.

early poetry shares this Romantic tendency[25], but his Imagist technique allowed only for vague suggestions of mood because objective description does not provide an adequate context for complex emotions. Nevertheless, an emphasis on objective description of the natural world could provide precise sensory details that suggest a "complex." If a poet's primary aim is to describe accurately an animal or a natural phenomena, he usually cannot avoid recognizing similarities as well as differences between man and the rest of the animal kingdom, or nature's indifference to man. He will confront the paradox that man is at least in one way distinct from the natural world he is dependent on: he can rationally distinguish himself from it. This paradox raises a "complex": ethical, epistemological, and metaphysical problems concerning how man should act on his understanding of his existence. These problems cannot be resolved in "an instant of time," but they can be implied if the initial sense perception is precise.

By closely observing the natural world, the speaker in Winters' early poetry often recognizes the philosophical problems inherent in immersing himself in nature. In accordance with

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[25] The Imagists were concerned with emphasizing emotion in their poetry, but, at least in theory, it did not affect, and was secondary to, objective description. The Imagists were also concerned with immersion in the non-human realm, though usually not nature in particular. Pound believed that the poet should strip himself of all save objective experience in artistic creation and become the "great true recorder" (Literary Essays 299-300). Winters states: "the cause of a perfectly fused poem is the fusion of a poet's consciousness with an object or group of objects of whatever nature" (Uncollected Essays 195).

Imagist principles, Winters' technique controls the poem's "emotionally charged ideas" because they are limited to, and formed from, the speaker's relationship to what he has precisely observed. Moreover, precise description of the natural world, as a primary aim, was exactly what was needed to counter directly the Romantic emphasis on emotion that the Imagists opposed; through precise description of the natural world, Winters was eventually led to an unromantic view of man as objectively defined against, as well as in, the natural world. Although Winters had many other influences in his early career, his exploration of Imagism, especially its demand for precision, contributed importantly to his break from the Romantic tendencies he later came to think of as influences in Imagism, Modernism, and his own poetry.

Each of the four early volumes differs in technique, but Winters' "seriousness" is apparent throughout. The Immobile Wind often lacks the precise descriptive quality of his subsequent volumes, but his concern for the relationship between mind and the natural world, though it usually takes the form of a kind of Romantic immersion in nature, constitutes an effective initial exploration of an "intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time." Despite the many slight poems in The Magpie's Shadow, his experimentation with American Indian verse in this volume made for a few instances of concise Imagist poetry. More importantly though, The Magpie's Shadow constituted an important step in his career. American Indian poetry is essentially non-

Romantic[26], and from this volume onwards, Winters' precision and recognition of the dangers of Romantic integration with nature increases. The Bare Hills combines the precision of The Magpie's Shadow and a sophisticated development of the "complex" presented in The Immobile Wind. The "complex" is more developed because the philosophical problems presented by man's absorption in nature are explored more thoroughly. The first third of The Proof contains Winters' best Imagist poetry. These poems have the precision and sophisticated "complex" of The Bare Hills, but also purge Romantic tendencies within the confines of Imagism, either by using traditional symbolism or undermining Romantic commonplaces. Capable of anti-Romantic Imagist poetry, Winters was then able to counter more effectively the limitations of both Romanticism's and Imagism's emphasis on emotion and sense perception by adopting the discursive style of traditional English poetry and giving up Imagism's limitation of an "instant of time."

In examining these volumes I will limit myself to Winters'

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26 Paula Gunn Allen makes distinctions between Indian and English poetry that are useful in understanding how Romanticism's tendency to emphasize the individual's emotive and psycological respsonse to his environment differs fundamentally from Indian poetry:

> The purpose of Native American Literature is never one of pure self-expression. The tribes do not celebrate an individual's ability to feel emotion, for it is assumed that all people are able to do so, making expression of this basic ability arrogant, presumptuous, and gratuitous. Besides, one's emotions are one's own: to suggest that another should imitate them is an imposition on the personal integrity of others (Paula Gunn Allen, "The Sacred Hoop," The Remembered Earth [Albuquerque: Red Earth Press, 1979] 222).

nature poetry, which is his predominant subject in his early years. I will also mostly limit myself to discussing his early poetry in the context of Imagism, though some discussion of his shift to traditional English forms is unavoidable, and indeed, essential, in discussing his Imagist years. This context will, I think, give more attention than has hitherto been given to his contribution to Imagism.

II. The Immobile Wind

Winters' first volume of poetry, The Immobile Wind, published in 1921, is in many ways his least interesting. It is not as formally innovative as his later volumes and accurate observations are only occasionally present. The poems are often primarily concerned with a kind of mystical union with nature. This metaphysical emphasis presents a "complex in an instant of time," but tends to subordinate, or even preclude, accurate observation. These poems offer static moments but not Imagism's limited temporal sequence of a movement from objective to subjective experience. In other poems in the same volume, however, Imagism's organizing principle is followed and accurate observation is the context for the "complex." In developing thought from observation, rather than simply recording them as simultaneous, the poet moves, in Pound's rather slippery terms, from "receiving" to "conceiving."[27] In Winters' poetry, the

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[27] In "Vorticism" Pound describes two ways of thinking of man:

> Firstly, you may think of him as that toward which perception moves, as the toy of circumstance, as the plastic substance "receiving" impressions; secondly, you may think of him as directing a certain fluid force against circumstance, as "conceiving" instead of merely reflecting and observing (467-68).

Pound's poem "In a Station at the Metro" can be considered as an act of "receiving impressions" because the speaker's thought about the crowd, that they have a ghostly-quality, is apparently simultaneous with actually seeing the crowd. His thought does not develop from a sense perception, but rather, it is received with one. Yet if Pound had adhered to his organizing principle of the "one image poem," he would have given at least some sense of the "thing outward and objective transforming itself (my emphasis) . . . into a thing inward and subjective," rather than presenting a static moment in which an impression is received.

former occurs when the speaker records a passive mental state in a mystical union with nature; the latter occurs when the speaker forms thoughts based on observation.

"Alone" is an example of a poem that concerns a speaker "receiving" rather than "conceiving." The speaker is a passive recipient in nature: "I, one who never speaks,/ Listened days in summer trees"(1-2).[28] He then seems to undergo a mystical process in which his unbelief becomes complete and he merges with the non-human world:

> Then in time my unbelief
> Grew like my running:
> My own eyes did not exist!
> When I struck I never missed!
> Noon, felt and far away,
> My brain is a thousand bees. (4-9)

Noon suggests stasis or a held moment that the speaker runs after in order to prolong, or as Terry Comito says, "motion becomes a sort of stasis, a perpetual meridian because it is no longer

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His organizing principle has the dynamic and intensive qualities he sought in the "vortex;" it is the poem rather than the theory that lacks these qualitites. In the context of Winters' poetry these terms are also helpful. The poems that primarily emphasize mystical union with nature can be understood as a kind of impressionism or "receiving." The speaker of the poem does not direct himself against circumstance, but rather, he allows it to invade his mind. The poem presupposes a mind capable of conception, but records a state of passivity in which no significant thought is possible. Just as the impressionist records a private view of the world, the mystic records a private view of himself. Both the impressionist's and the mystic's mental state presupposes "reception" rather than "conception": neither actively forms thought, though in recording the state they must have a mind capable of forming ideas.

[28] Yvor Winters, Collected Poems of Yvor Winters (Chicago: Swallow Press, 1978) 94. All further citations of Winters' poetry will be be taken from this edition.

measured against a fixed point distinct from its flow."[29] The running man's desire for a "perpetual meridian" is like his desire for the stasis of perpetual "unbelief." His state of unbelief allows him to form a close union with nature about which he forms ideas: "My own eyes did not exist"; "My brain is a thousand bees." He could not have formed these ideas while his brain was a "thousand bees," however. Indeed, he could have formed no thought at all. As Terry Comito says, "[the speaker's] consciousness is at one with the buzzing enegies of nature."[30] The speaker's state presupposes a "receiving" agent, yet the poem itself presupposes a "conceiving" poet.[31]

One way that Winters avoids this incongruity is to use a child speaker. "To be Sung by a Small Boy Who Herds Goats" fuses a number of images in order to suggest a boy's absorption in nature. The fusion is strained, but the comparisons, and the boy's absorption, are plausible given a boy speaker. In the first stanza the boy delightfully describes his goats as "rough hair/ On earth" (1-2). The boy, like the goats, is also brown and creeps on the mountains. In the final stanza the boy

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29 Defense of Winters 34.

30 Defense of Winters 33.

31 Winters later concluded that the mystical experience itself could not be written about:

> This experience [the mystical experience], the mystics tell us, is supra-rational, is intuitive in the theological sense of the term, and is essentially unrelated to human experience; and since language is the tool of discursive reason and functions in time rather than eternity, the mystical experience cannot really be discussed. (Forms of Discovery [Chicago: Swallow Press, 1967] 90).

rejoices at his absorption in nature:

> Who on the brown earth
> Knows himself one?
> Life is in lichens
> That sleep as they run. (13-16)

Hence goat, boy, and lichens share the same environment, colour, and, perhaps, movement (one could say they all "creep" on the mountain); therefore, they are all "one." A child's intellect is not as developed as an adult's, so the boy's conclusion is plausible because it is based on his limited rational abilities. The fusion of images and the boy's conclusion ignore important differences between man, goats, and lichens; these differences would force the adult speaker either to acknowledge that he is in some ways distinct from the natural world or to undergo a mystical union in order to transcend that which differentiates him from nature, his reason. The joy the boy finds in considering himself at one with nature makes for a delightful, if limited, poem, but it could not have succeeded with an intellectually developed speaker. In short, one expects the adult speaker to observe more closely and have a more complex relationship to nature. In "Alone" the speaker only presents subjective experience and avoids the difficulty of objectively comparing himself to the natural world.

In "Hawk's Eyes," however, the speaker unsuccessfully attempts to compare his daily walks to the movement of a hawk's eyes:

> As a gray hawk's eyes
> Turn here and away,
> So my course turns

Where I walk each day.

The speaker here, unlike in "Alone," is not immersed in the natural world, but he does assert a limited comparison that warrants close examination. Douglas Peterson claims that the poem suggests that "existence is merely awareness, random and arbitrary."[32] Under close examination, however, it implies something quite different. The poem may imply that the movement of the speaker, like the movement of the hawk, is without thought; however, the movement of the hawk's eyes has a definite purpose that the speaker's walks do not seem to share. A hawk's eyes move in order to search for prey or look for incursions on his territory, and they also move very quickly. The poem does not suggest that the speaker's walks have this purpose, nor could any human being follow a course based on the rapid movement of a hawk's eyes. Insofar as the speaker is making a comparison he is a "conceiving" agent, yet the idea he forms about the relationship between himself and the hawk is only a private, incomplete impression which is not informed by either close observation or careful thought. He is not wrong in comparing himself with an animal (men, like animals, rely to a limited extent on sense perception and instinct, and they do share the same environment), but a comparison implies both similarites and dissimilarities, neither of which are made clear in this poem.

In "Two Songs of Advent" objective and subjective experience

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[32] Douglas Peterson, "The Poetry of Yvor Winters: The Achievement of a Style," Southern Review 17 (1981): 910.

are not blurred, and a relationship, though a somewhat indefinite one, is established between the two. The first "Song" describes feeble human voices in a desert:

> On the desert between pale mountains, our cries--
> Far whispers creeping through an ancient shell. (1-2)

The human voice only carries faintly through the "ancient shell" of earth, but the coyote's "voice," in the second "Song," carries very well:

> Coyote, on delicate mocking feet,
> Hovers down the canyon, among the mountains,
> His voice running wild in the wind's valleys (3-5).

The strength of the coyote's "voice" is evidence of his integration with the natural world; his presence is much stronger than man's. The speaker's implicit recognition of the difference between himself and the coyote forces him to consider his isolation from the world of the coyote. Yet the coyote is an attractive figure, so the speaker allows him to intrude: "Listen! Listen! for I enter now your thought" (6). Exactly how or why the coyote intrudes is left quite vague, but that vagueness does not cloud the initial aural distinction between the human and the coyote's voice. The speaker may end up with a "coyote brain," but not without first distinguishing himself from the coyote. Unlike "Alone," "Two Songs of Advent" does not presuppose a passive speaker simply receiving a private impression of himself; unlike "Hawk's Eyes" the speaker's observation of the natural world is not a private impression of an animal.

The "complex" of "Two Songs of Advent" includes the idea

that man is distinct from the world he inhabits, as seen in the distinction made between man and the coyote, and the idea of beauty in nature, as seen in the description of the coyote. Based on accurate observation, these ideas are public rather than private. The possibility of merging with the natural world is also part of the "complex," and can be seen as a passive, private response to public ideas, which are grounded in sense perception. These ideas raise the desire, as well as the difficulty, of immersion. The complexity found in "Two Songs of Advent" is not evident in the previous poems. Moreover, they do not offer a distinct objective experience on which to base one's understanding of the speaker's private impressions of himself, the world around him, and his relationship to the natural world.

The most extended exploration of man's relationship to nature in The Immobile Wind is "Two Dramatic Interludes for Puppets." The work is somewhat obscure and is often overlooked by critics for that reason. Terry Comito suggest that the blue, black, and white puppets (from Cherokee poetry) represent, respectively, loneliness, death, and happiness.[33] Although White Puppet shares the American Indian's attitude to nature, the poem makes no explicit reference to American Indian culture. What is apparent in the poem, however, is a variety of poetic responses to the natural world. Therefore, the poem might be better approached simply as an examination of poetic attitudes to nature.

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[33] Defense of Winters 35.

The poem opens with what can be understood as a kind of poetic showdown with each puppet reworking the other's imagery. Blue Puppet is immersed in the sea, and by implication, nature: "I sit and whisper, and the sea,/ A drifting feather, sinks to me" (1-2). In contrast, Black Puppet is initially an observer, above water and detached from nature: "Beneath my bent eyes water flows/ Obliquely to my slanting nose" (3-4). Blue Puppet's excessive emotional response to evening marks him as a sentimentalist, and, in the eyes of the Imagists, a Romantic:

> Cry to the twilight,
> Cry to the twilight,
> It flew, a long arrow,
> And buried itself in the west. (5-8)

Black Puppet also uses war imagery to describe the evening, but his objectivity marks him as an Imagist:

> Night lies, a battered shield,
> Against the eastern hill.
> The soul of twilight is insects singing. (11-13)

For Black Puppet, nature is less attractive; moreover, it is only animated by that which inhabits it, and he chooses to describe that animation by one of its least human-like forms of life, insects. In addition, Black Puppet himself is not animated by nature and is only partially immersed in it: "My hands are like autumn waters running--" (15). Blue Puppet, however, describes his attempt to transcend temporal "fact" and, presumably, enter a mystical state: "Then I fled through time like the arrow of twilight" (25).

Black Puppet's objectivity becomes blurred when he tries to rid himself of Blue Puppet's Romanticism. After killing Blue

Puppet, he adopts Blue Puppet's Romantic attitude to nature. He cries "for pain to enter him" and becomes further immersed in the natural world as his eyes become merged with shadows on the pines:

> I stand with my hands within the waters of the day--
> They fall like sunrays in long lines;
> My eyes are shadows on the pines. (34-36)

Hence Black Puppet stops observing, and his awareness of the world around him suffers:

> I did not know
> I saw him [a bluebird] go
> Till I glanced
> Down the stream. (41-44).

In addition, his comparisons, while still Imagistic, become more strained and sentimental:

> The smooth sharpness of a dangling leaf,
> Struggling with receding sap within,
> Is like a face that hides its grief. (50-52)

The description of the leaf itself and of the process by which it falls in autumn is quite good, with the precision and brevity of the best Imagist poetry. As a context for grief, or for a "complex," however, it is far-fetched and Romantic in attaching excessive emotion to the object described. Black Puppet's transformation then seems to suggest emotionally charged ideas concerning the problems of immersion in nature: after, and even immediately before, he kills Blue Puppet, his ability to observe lessens and becomes clouded with emotion. By engaging with Romanticism in order to be free of it, Black Puppet seems unable to rid himself of its flaws. Or to put this another way, in including a "complex" in his Imagist "poem," he seems to fall

into the sentimentalism the Imagists objected to.

If Blue Puppet represents traditional Romanticism and Black Puppet a kind of Romantic Imagism, then White Puppet, who is introduced in the second "Interlude," represents primitive pantheism. He sees himself as one with nature, but his emotions are not explicit in his description of that relationship:

> My life is green water seen
> Through a white rose leaf.
> It has a sheen. (1-3)

White Puppet's consciousness does not have to be transcended for him to see himself as animated by the natural world: his life is "green water seen;" his mind is "a white bird." Implicit in his view of the natural world is his immersion in it, and he, therefore, need not describe the process of immersion. In contrast, Black Puppet can describe a coyote, but he cannot incorporate his emotion, or a system of belief, into that description:

> Coyote is green eyes
> On dust whirl of yellow hair--
> My passion is untold. (31-33)

For White Puppet, however, the coyote has a certain spiritual presence associated with a natural phenomenon:

> Coyote is an ether
> That is shaken in the air.
> He hovers about me
> When the day is white. (34-37)

Moreover, White Puppet's objective view of nature is not blurred, though it is general: "He [coyote] passes swifter/ Than the runner in the night" (38-39)

The "Interludes" end with each puppet presenting short

narrative sketches. White Puppet's speeches again presuppose an integration with nature, but his integration is not an emotional condition, but rather, a physical condition in which he is merged with the air: "I saw far below me/ The falling yellow wheat" (47-48). In contrast, Black Puppet's descriptions are excessively emotional and become obscure:

> The wind, a wounded rabbit
> Dragged itself beneath a pinyon;
> And I looked into the eyes
> Of the chipmunk morning. (49-52)

Black Puppet's comparison is strained and his "chipmunk morning" is simply inexplicable; he seems to be going mad. White Puppet considers himself at one with the natural world, yet he avoids the dangers of madness and annihilation:

> Sunlight falls
> Across my hair
> As leaves fall
> On the water. (53-56)

Real sunlight does not penetrate past White Puppet's hair into his mind, just as a leaf stays on the surface of the water: he may choose to view himself as close to nature, but he does not allow the natural world to invade all of his thought processes nor control his emotions. Black Puppet's excessive emotionalism tends toward extinction as well as madness:

> He who knoweth, listeneth;
> I turn about and hear again--
> My hair is smooth with death
> And whirls above my brain. (57-60)

His use of archaic diction is striking in a work of otherwise plain diction and may indicate that Black Puppet recognizes that his relationship to the natural world is poetic and filled with

Romantic tendencies. His whirling hair may allude to the mad poet's "floating hair" of "Kubla Kahn." Certainly Black Puppet faces the problems of a Romantic treatment of nature: his attempt to give an emotional emphasis to sense perception tends to preclude accurate description and leads to a mad attempt to merge with nature. He cannot share White Puppet's primitive pantheism because it is entirely foreign to him: he cannot imitate or rework it as he did with Blue Puppet's Romanticism. Neither Romantic pantheism nor primitive pantheism is a valid alternative for Black Puppet.

"Two Dramatic Interludes for Puppets" is not a very coherent narrative, but it offers a range of descriptive methods and suggestions of the effect of adopting each one that are important to consider. Winters at this very early stage in his career already seems to have at least a tacit understanding of the limitations of Imagism as a means of describing man's relationship to nature. Black Puppet, as an Imagist poet, cannot rid himself of Romanticism in adopting an Imagist mode of writing, nor can he emulate White Puppet's primitive pantheism. He is led to an attempt to merge with nature that results in madness and annihilation. White Puppet is a sane pantheist and he is not sentimental; the possibility he represents is more appealing than the Imagist Romanticism of Black Puppet or the traditional Romanticism of Blue Puppet. White Puppet's

unsentimental pantheism is typical of American Indian verse[34], and it is this quality that greatly interested Winters and informs his next volume, The Magpie's Shadow.

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[34] The isolation from society felt by the Romantic wanderer and figures from modern poetry would be considered by the Cherokees as the "depth of degradation" (George Cronyn ed., American Indian Poetry, [New York: Liveright, 1934] 38); Indian poetry was rarely the expression of an individualist (A. Grove Day ed., The Sky Clears, [Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1951] 2).

III. The Magpie's Shadow

Winters' second volume, The Magpie's Shadow, is unique in the Imagist cannon because of its form (it consists entirely of three stress poems) and its style. Kenneth Fields has gone as far as to say that "these poems achieve the aims of the Imagists better than they themselves were able to do, even to Pound's admonition: 'Use no superfluous word.'"[35] The poems in this volume are certainly brief and, a few, precise. But Fields also adds that the volume is a "simple book with obvious limitations."[36] Indeed, despite some of the poems achieving the brevity and precision the Imagists strived for, finding more than simple, seemingly insignificant statements in these poems requires some ingenuity. Nevertheless, in first examining the stylistic influences in this volume, then the poems themselves, one does note at times a good deal of careful thought and observation in a few concise, if limited, poems.

Like many other poets in the twenties, Winters was influenced by the rising interest in American Indian and Oriental poetry. He did not, however, write about Indians like his contemporary Hart Crane, nor did he use Oriental imagery and Chinese characters like Pound. Many critics have noted both influences, but how each influence stylistically manifests itself in Winters' Magpie's Shadow has not yet been examined in depth.

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35 Rhetoric of Artifice 234.
36 Rhetoric of Artifice 235.

For Winters, American Indian poetry seemed to offer an objectivity and implicit effect that coincided with Imagism. In his essay "The Indian in English" Winters notes an intense precision in Indian poetry: "These poems, so minute in appearance, shrill as the voice of a gnat dying out past the ear. . . ."[37] More importantly, Winters sees something more than just an aesthetic purpose in their poetry:

> Nothing can be more ridiculous than this self-conscious effort to imitate a metric which belongs to a group of languages and a feeling for music as remote as possible from our own; to reshuffle an imagery and a system of emotional notation that arose from a concentrated effort of an entire race for centuries on problems of which we know nothing. But it is easier to play this game than that played by the Indian--that of mastering one's own universe.[38]

He notes a purpose in their poetry, mastering their universe, that has an beneficial social effect: to control one's universe is to ensure one's own and the tribe's welfare. He knew that that same purpose could not be reproduced in Imagist poetry, yet the idea that poetry could have a direct effect of some kind likely appealed to him.

Though Winters did not give a detailed description of every element of American Indian poetry in that essay, his understanding of it is apparent. Let us, therefore, briefly examine their poetry to better understand its relationship to The Magpie's Shadow. Indian poetry differs greatly according to its purpose, but an example that would have appealed to the Imagists

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37 Uncollected Essays 36.
38 Uncollected Essays 42-3.

is a good starting point. The following poem, "The Water-Bug," is from the Yuma tribe, collected by a translator whom Winters read, Frances Densmore[39]: "The Water-bug is drawing the shadows of evening toward him across the water."[40] In translation, the poem does not seem to have a definite form, though it did in its original language. American Indian poetry was set to music, and doing so distinguished it from prose. Vowels were prolonged in order to fill out the musical phrase.[41] The measure of the line was integral to the poem and liberties were never taken with it; even the extended vowels were considered unchangeable.[42] American Indian verse is in this way similar to traditional English poetry: one cannot alter pronunciation in English poetry without damaging its rhythm and metre. Therefore, American Indian poetry had a definite form and only resembled free verse in translation.

Despite "The Water Bug's" precision, accurate description of the natural world was not its primary end; the similarity to Imagism is superficial and the result of translation. "Water-Bug" was a medicine song with a curative purpose.[43] The intention behind the poem is magical: "[the Indian] saw nothing incongruous in performing acts [such as singing poems and

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39 Uncollected Essays 36.
40 The Sky Clears 87.
41 Sky Clears 3.
42 Sky Clears 3.
43 Sky Clears 87.

perfoming rituals] that he hoped the Gods of nature would imitate and thus . . . assist in drawing away . . . [the] disease."[44] His pantheistic beliefs lie outside the poem, because to include them would be a statement of belief rather than an imitation of the object he desires to control for a social purpose: he imitates, rather than integrates himself with, nature. The poem must imitate its subject in a precise way to achieve the desired results: a kind of social magic that aims at preserving society.

Whereas description in Imagist poetry does not have such a social purpose, it does, surprisingly, at times have a magic-like intention. Magic can be defined as any set of actions that, if done correctly, must produce a certain desired result. Many Imagist and Modernist theories seem to presuppose something similar to magic. Concerning rhythm, Pound states: "I believe in an 'absolute rhythm,' a rhythm, that is, in poetry which corresponds exactly (my emphasis) to the emotion or shade of emotion to be expressed."[45] Given the right rhythm, the exact desired emotion must be produced. Pound's later definition of the image as a "vortex" implies that an image must summon ideas: "It [the image] is a radiant node or cluster; it is what I can, and must perforce, call a VORTEX, from which and through which, ideas are constantly rushing."[46] The "vortex" only differs from the "complex" in that the former suggests a stronger movement of

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44 Sky Clears 63.
45 Literary Essays 9.
46 "Vorticism" 469.

ideas, but both seem to imply that a precise description will naturally call forth precise ideas and emotion. A famous example of this tendency towards magical poetry comes from T. S. Eliot:

> The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an "objective correlative"; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked.[47]

Eliot's "objective correlative" can be understood as a kind of magical ritual: by describing a "a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events," the desired emotion must be produced.

Of course neither the Imagists nor Eliot set out to create magical poetry, but their theories seem to have an intention that is similar to that of magic. They did not greatly value magic, and certainly Winters did not, yet the idea that an objective description, constructed in the proper way, must evoke a particular effect seems to constitute the area of greatest similarity between Imagism and American Indian poetry. The Imagists also admired the American Indians' precise and economic style, but Indians did not always use that style: Indian verse is often repetitious and cryptic. In The Magpie's Shadow, Winters aims at the spare style and accurate description of American Indian poetry, as well as the magic-like intention of Imagism.

The poems in The Magpie's Shadow rely mostly on objective description to evoke emotion. Terry Comito claims that the

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47 T. S. Eliot, "Hamlet and His Problems," The Sacred Wood (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1967) 100.

volume's "unspoken context is the same dialectic of presence and absence, being and consciousness, that The Immobile Wind confronted more directly."[48] But this "unspoken context," or "hovering anxiety" as he later calls it, is rarely apparent in the poems themselves. Accurately describing the natural world can be understood as defining it, or distinguishing it from one's self, rather than allowing it to invade the mind. The poet exerts his mind to describe the world accurately, rather than allowing his mind passively to receive a private impression of it.

A way of understanding how some of the poems achieve accurate description is to view them as a sophisticated reworking of Fenollosa's Chinese character. This is simply an aid to reading the poems, however, because Winters did not intend to emulate Fenollosa's Chinese character. Fenollosa's conception of the Chinese character is as follows:

> A true noun, an isolated thing, does not exist in nature. Things are only the terminal points, or rather the meeting points of action, cross-sections cut through actions, snap-shots. Neither can a pure verb, an abstract motion, be possible in nature. The eye sees noun and verb as one: things in motion, motion in things, and so the Chinese conception tends to represent them.
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> The sun sign tangled in the branches of the tree sign= east.[49]

Fenollosa's example of a Chinese character contradicts his description of it. The sun sign's tangledness, not simply

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48 Defense of Winters 55.

49 Ernest Fenollosa, "The Chinese Character as a Medium for Poetry", in Instigations (Freeport: Books for Libraries Press, Inc., 1967) 364.

tangledness itself, aids our understanding of "east." That is, we see a subject and a verb in association with another subject. This same kind of association is present in the poems of The Magpie's Shadow. A typical example of this structure is "Blue Mountain": "A deer walks that mountain" (p. 55). This poem does not offer a detailed description, but it is not impressionistic. Essentially, the poem associates a specific acting subject, a walking deer, with a certain object, a mountain. The poem is not analogous to a Fenollosian Chinese character because a walking deer cannot be a pictorial representation of a mountain. What I want to emphaize is the association itself and how it defines the intention and content of the poems in this volume. In making an association the poem pressuposes a "conceiving" speaker as well as a "conceiving" poet, and avoids the incongruity between a "receiving" speaker and a "conceiving" poet found in poems that describe an integration with nature.

In many of the poems, however, the principle of association is very weak and the "conceiving" speaker is not really insightful. "Man in Desert" presents an incongruous simile: "His feet run as eyes blink" (p. 34). "High Valleys" is not based on conscious observation: "In sleep I filled these lands" (p. 34). "A Lady" is static and impressionistic: "She's sun on autumn leaves" (p. 33). In "Cool Nights" the association between object and action is arbitrary: "At night bare feet on flowers" (p. 33). The weakness of these poems is their idiosyncracy.

In other poems, however, the association is controlled and

informs public phenomena; one sometimes finds precision and economy in some of the poems. One poem that is often described as obscure is "Sunrise": "Pale bees! O whither now?" (p. 32). Kenneth Fields says the poem consists of two unrelated perceptions[50]; Terry Comito says that what is announced in the title is absent from the text.[51] Yet with only a little ingenuity the poem can be understood as describing a very particular action that is associated with sunrise. At that time the bees will appear pale because there is very little light, but they also are pale in the metaphoric sense of lacking animation: being cold-blooded they must warm up before they can go about their daily activities. Hence the speaker notes the previously cold, slow moving bees and questions where they are going, now that they are sufficiently warmed to fly. The description cannot, of course, correspond to an exact emotion as Pound's "absolute rhythm" and Eliot's "objective correlative" theories suggest because there is not a developed context for an emotion. The poem offers a very vague sense of wonderment, but its emotional content is rather weak. The strength of this poem is that the association between sunrise and bees is controlled. More importantly though, the speaker at least implicitly defines himself against the insect world, unlike in "Alone."

Winters at times engages in imitation, but not integration. In "A Deer," the speaker seems to view the dawn as

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50 The Rhetoric of Artifice 234.
51 Defense of Winters 54.

a deer would: "The trees rose in the dawn" (p. 34). Yet one does not have to consider the speaker as integrated with the deer. The speaker is simply imitating the deer in order to ensure a desired result, in this case, evoking an emotion. "The Aspen's Song," "The summer holds me here" (p. 33), too can be considered as imitative, rather than integrative, for the same reasons.

In some poems the speaker defines himself in the form of a narrative, though sometimes without the expected connectives. The speaker of "Myself" presents a very slim narrative:

> Pale mornings, and
> I rise.

Waking is the only time when one encounters consciousness from a different state, unconsciousness; hence waking is an appropriate action to associate with one's being. In other poems, the narrative is syntactically fragmented. "Still Morning" simply describes a physical reflex: "Snow air -- my fingers curl" (p. 31). One could simply delete the dash and put the word "in" at the beginning of the sentence to conform to normal syntax. The juxtaposition of "Winter Echo" is also due to its fragmented syntax: "Thin air! My mind is gone" (p. 31). This poem may imply, as Comito says, that "the mind alone, cut off from the world, drained of all content, is no mind at all,"[52] but let us first see if it does not contain the accurate observation we find in other poems. "Thin air" is a common term for atmosphere that

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52 Defense of Winters 57.

lacks oxygen, the kind of atmosphere found in mountains where the echo effect is best. In a mountain atmosphere, unless one is used to it, one tends to lose consciousness; yelling to make an echo would speed this process. Of course, as with other poems in this volume, my interpretation may be somewhat ingenious, but let us again pause to examine the poem's association. If the poem does suggest Comito's claim, then it does so by recognizing a public phenomenon that may imply what extinguishing thought is like. That is, a private phenomenon, the loss of one's mind, is given a context in a public phenomenon, losing consciousness in a high atmosphere.

Indeed, an understanding of, rather than an immersion in, the natural world, informs the best of the poems in this volume, though most are not as complex as "Sunrise" and "Winter Echo." Winters took the title of the volume from the Indian poem "The Magpie Song":

> The Magpie! The Magpie! Here underneath
> In the white of his wings are the footsteps of morning.
> It dawns! It dawns![53]

This poem was sung before the approach of a false dawn during the Indian's moccasin game (the game could not be played in sunlight).[54] The elaborate rituals of the American Indian are not present in Winters' volume, nor is it always necessary to see a private ritual in his poetry. His poem "The Hunter" alludes to "The Magpie Song," but neither an American Indian nor a personal

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[53] Sky Clears 96.
[54] Sky Clears 96.

context is necessary for its explication: "Run! In the magpie's shadow" (p. 31). Comito asserts that in this poem one again encounters "elusiveness."[55] But dawn is a good time to hunt because animals are still drowsy; the poem could simply be an urging of the hunter to the hunt: the hunter hunting is associated with dawn. "Desert" could simply be recording that the tent of golden leaves one finds in other autumn climates is absent in the desert: "The tented autumn gone" (p. 34). "The End" could simply be noting that night does not offer as clear a definition of size as daylight: "Dawn rose, and desert shrunk" (p. 34). In other words, the desert appears much larger at night because it lacks a horizon. I am not so much disagreeing with critics who find metaphysical concerns in these poems as emphasizing something more mundanely present: Winters' increasing concern for public natural phenomena rather than private impressions like those found in The Immobile Wind.

This concern is likely owing to the influence of American Indian poetry. In The Magpie's Shadow, as in the American Indian poetry that he admired, Winters' stylistic aim is accurate observation and subordination of emotion and private impression. He also gained a motive for precise objective description of nature in poetry: it offered controlled association. In The Magpie's Shadow, the desired effect is largely mood. More importantly though, in accurate observation and understanding of the natural phenomena he found a method of implying an intense,

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55 Defense of Winters 58.

but limited, "complex" concerning man's relationship to nature. Of course these concerns are implicit, but they are, perhaps, a more valuable study than the poetry itself, which is limited and often slight.

In his next two Imagist works, The Bare Hills and the first section of The Proof, his precision is the basis for more developed "complexes" because he explores more thoroughly the relationship between man and the natural world. One of the objects of this exploration is the limitation that sense perception imposes on the poet: the "conceiving" mind is limited by the particular. In his later, traditional, poetry, however, his precise observation of nature has a much stronger purpose than simply implying moral and philosophical problems: precise description of the natural world leads to a precise understanding of it; a precise understanding of the natural world ensures one's own, and society's, welfare. The importance of American Indian poetry in Winters' career has perhaps been overlooked. Winters found its implicitly social view of the natural world admirable; however, in his later career he employed discourse, not association, to achieve that same admirable view.

IV. "Testament of a Stone"

Between the publication of The Magpie's Shadow (1922) and The Bare Hills (1927) Winters published a number of reviews and essays that are important for understanding his development of Imagism. In his reviews of other poets, not all of them Imagists, he notes elements of the precise and intense style he admired. More important for the study of his early poetry though, is his essay "The Testament of a Stone: Being notes on the Mechanics of the Poetic Image." Here Winters attempted to define precision and intensity and to schematize the image. Most of the essay concerns the relationship between sound and meaning, but this part of the essay is rather confusing and lies outside my area of study. What I intend to examine is the ways in which Winters' "seriousness" took Imagist theory to its only possible conclusion: subordination of the "conceiving" mind. As Kenneth Fields says in the discussing of Winters' early poetry: "He takes these theories as far as they may be taken . . . and finds to his despair what Pound and Williams scarcely understood: that the theories lead to a dead-end."[56]

Winters reviewed non-Imagist as well as Imagist poets in the twenties, but what he often admired in the former was their Imagist qualities. The predominant theme in these reviews is the value of accurate perception. In his review (1922) of The Collected Poems of Edwin Arlington Robinson he condemns poets

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56 Rhetoric of Artifice 244.

like Walt Whitman because they forget that "it is only the particular, the perception that is perpetually startling."[57] In the same review Winters puts great value on accurate "thought-perception" as well as accurate "sense perception":

> It is not the material that makes a poem great, but the perception and organization of that material. A pigeon's wing may make as great an image as a man's tragedy, and in the poetry of Mr. Wallace Stevens has done so. Mr. Robinson's greatness lies not in the people of whom he has written, but in the perfect balance, the infallible precision, with which he has stated their cases.[58]

Winters' emphasis here is on the "particular perception," whether primarily objective, as in Stevens, or primarily subjective, as in Robinson. His main emphasis, however, tends to be on accurate sense perception.

Winters' "image" defines how sense perception should be presented. The "image" is anti-intellectual and presupposes the magic-like intention one finds elsewhere in Imagism. In Winters' view, two sense perceptions, arranged properly, will automatically communicate the emotion: "[the image is] a fusion of sense perceptions [that] presents the emotion; that is, the emotion is seen in the concrete and acts directly, without the aid of thought."[59] He explains the "fusion" as follows: "they

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[57] Uncollected Essays 4. Pound makes a similar claim about the Victorians in "A Retrospect": "In the art of Daniel and Cavalcanti, I have seen that precision which I miss in the Victorians, that explicit rendering, be it of external nature, or of emotion. Their testimony is of the eyewitness, their symptoms are first hand" (Literary Essays 11).

[58] Uncollected Essays 5.

[59] Uncollected Essays 200.

[two observations] will fuse at the point where they are the same, or, to be more exact, they will be the same at one point."[60] Winters' "image" is a radical departure from traditional poetic comparisons, such as similes and metaphors. A simile can be defined as "a figure of speech in which a similarity between two objects is directly expressed"; a metaphor can be defined as "an implied analogy which imaginatively identifies one object with another and ascribes to the first one or more of the qualities of the second or invests the first with emotional or imaginative qualities associated with the second[61]"; both imply a degree of likeness as well as unlikeness. Winters' "fusion," however, entails sameness or complete identity at one point; sameness implies a shared essential quality, not just a likeness. For example, a woman's flushed cheek may resemble a ripe apple in colour, but the colours' sources are not essentially the same: a cheek's redness is owing to an increased flow of oxygenated blood; an apple's to a presence of a large amount of ethylene gas; each object is composed of very different substances. The comparison of the two is effective, however, because dissimilarities narrow and strengthen the area of similarity: redness and implied fullness. Winters seems to recognize that the "image" implies dissimilarities.[62] But in

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60 Uncollected Essays 199.

61 William Flint Thrall, and Addison Hibbard, A Handbook to Literature (New York: The Odyssey Press, 1960) 281, 460.

62 Uncollected Essays 199-200.

order for observations to be the same at one point, they would have to share at least one identical essential quality, which would pressupose a range of identical qualities. For example, one could compare how a zebra runs with how a pony runs and conclude that their running is the same. But they can only be the same at one point (how they run), because they are the same in many other respects, both are odd-toed ungulates who share the same body shape, bone structure, and other features that contribute to their motion. In noting that a zebra and pony run the same, one has nothing against which to define their particular kind of running because the comparison lacks a significant area of dissimilarity. In effect, one no longer has comparison, but rather, notation of sameness; without comparison, the area of similarity is largely a result of neutral observation, rather than of the poet's creative mind.

Winters' example of the "image" does not contain a fusion, but rather a metaphor: "At one stride comes the dark."[63] A striding man and a revolving planet comprise two entirely different kinds of motion. Yet we can understand how quickly darkness comes in an equatorial climate because the coming of darkness is given the quality of a man's stride. The effectiveness of this metaphor is that the two kinds of motion that are compared define a specific area of similarity: they cannot be similar except in the quality of quickness. We know exactly what Coleridge is attempting to describe in his metaphor.

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63 Uncollected Essays 200.

The important point here is that the "image" or "fusion" is much more limited than a simile or metaphor. What Winters seems to try do is to define comparison in an untraditional way by proposing that it can be made by careful observation alone: observations, when properly placed together, automatically "fuse" by virtue of the poet's "finer vision."[64] This process cannot really be adequately explained, and the more likely result of it is either a private impression of what the poet thinks is a "fusion," or, if he really does have a "finer vision," a good comparison.

For Winters, however, the poet's ability to write a good poem does not depend on his "finer vision" or "conceiving" mind: "the cause of a perfectly fused poem is the fusion of the poet's consciousness with an object or group of objects of whatever nature."[65] The poet seems to undergo some kind of transformation: a mystical union with an object. If the poet can indeed be the same as a group of objects, that does not mean he can make the objects themselves the "same at one point." Moreover, the problem lies in the fact that sense perception is involuntary, though recording it requires thought. Since the Imagist movement as a whole scorned abstractions, they had to define a method in which objective experience could be recorded

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64 Winters claims that only people with a "finer vision' are able to create an "image." This ability seems to be primarily physical because it depends on the poet's ability to note two observations that "fuse" at one point. Rational thought does not seem to be part of the process (Uncollected Essays 199).

65 Uncollected Essays 195.

in a way that did not presuppose abstract thought. In advancing the method of "fusion" to achieve this end, Winters proposed a "receiving" agent who allows objects to invade his mind. Winters took the idea of going "in fear of abstractions" to its "logical" conclusion, but in doing so he denied the "conceiving" mind.

The idea that sound could communicate emotion and meaning was another way in which the Imagists, and Winters in particular, attempted to avoid the necessity of including abstract thought in poetry. In his review of Marianne Moore, Winters implies that only the "image" offers a perfectly fused poem:

> The emotional unit of a poem may be divided into two general types: the "image," in which all sound and meaning elements fuse into a single physical whole; and the "anti-image," in which the relationship of at least one element to the rest is non-physical, which precludes the possibility of the sound-element containing onomatopoeic value for its entire meaning content, as onomoatopoeia is purely a physical affair.[66]

By "onomatopoeic value" Winters means words whose sound fuses perfectly with their meaning: "Such words are the nouns 'leaves,' 'dresses,' 'dust,' 'breath'."[67] Winters does not explain exactly what comprises this fusion, nor do I think such an explanation is possible. The "s" sound in "dresses" could be said to sound like a rustling dress (I think this is what Winters is implying, though not all dresses rustle), but one could also argue that that same sound resembles a hissing snake or a leaking tire. By "onomatopoeic value" Winters also means words that fuse

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66 Uncollected Essays 23.
67 Uncollected Essays 211.

with their context in a line. For example, in the sentence "the snake slides slowly" one could say the "s" sounds of "slides slowly" imitate a hissing snake, but there is no snake in the "s" sounds of "Susan sips slowly." Of course sound is important in poetry, but it must be subordinate to meaning. In "Testament of a Stone" Winters puts too much emphasis on sound:

> Then there are words that represent abstractions, whose meanings have no relationship to anything physical, and so can have no aesthetic necessity--that is, if the sound of any word can be proven to be other than accidental.[68]

Winters does seem to believe that the sound of some words actually does have a direct relationship to their meaning, but sound alone does not convey meaning and its contribution to poetry's aesthetic value is minor. By emphasizing sound in order to devalue abstractions, he denies, in effect, the largely conceptual nature of language.

Yet Winters' "anti-image" presupposes a conscious, "conceiving" poet. Let us examine a review, and a poem from The Magpie's Shadow, to better understand Winters' "anti-image." In a review published in 1925, a year after "Testament of Stone," Winters praises Marianne Moore for a quality found in his own poetry and makes an important point that is not found in "Testament of a Stone." Winters claims that "the metaphysical can attain imagic existence and hence the greatest possible intensity only when expressed in terms of the physical."[69] Let

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68 Uncollected Essays 211-12.
69 Uncollected Essays 23.

us return to a poem in The Magpie's Shadow, "Winter Echo," to see how Winters achieves metaphysical intensity in the physical: "Thin Air! My mind is gone." If my reading is correct, we have here a physical process, losing consciousness in a high altitude, which suggests a metaphysical process, losing one's mind. The "winter echo" is a physical phenomenon, a voice without mind, that suggests a metaphysical phenomenon, a being without mind.

This poem gives thought, which generates an emotion, perhaps of terror, a context in a sensory experience, and in doing so follows Winters' definition of the "anti-image":[70]

> It is possible in thinking of observations, to find intellectual "correlations" that are not evident to the simple senses, but that may transmit an aesthetic emotion, not directly as in the case of sense perceptions, but through the intellect. Here the emotion is transmitted by intercomment rather than by fusion. This phenomenon may be called the "anti-image," as the sense perceptions of the observation do not fuse at any point.[71]

"Winter Echo" establishes a correlation between sensory experience and the thought that arises from it: a correlation between physical experience and a similar metaphysical experience. Winters "anti-image" combines both the "complex" and the organizing principle of Imagism into a single definition. The "anti-image" is an intellectual correlation that transmits an emotion; therefore, it presents an "emotional and intellectual complex." The intellectual correlation is based on a sense

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[70] It is possible Winters may have had the "anti-image" in mind when he wrote The Magpie's Shadow. Powell claims Winters drafted "The Testament of a Stone" in 1921 (Language as Being 20).

[71] Uncollected Essays 200.

perception; therefore, it follows the organizing principle of presenting objective experience as it is transformed into subjective experience. In the "anti-image," however, there must be a correlative relationship between sense perception and thought, whereas in Pound's "one image poem" the relationship could be entirely private. The "aesthetic feeling" that the "anti-image" generates is particular to art and is similar to Eliot's goal that art should express emotions "different in kind from any experience not of art."[72] Eliot's influence is apparent, but the "anti-image" goes further than Eliot's "objective correlative" in which "external facts" immediately evoke emotion. The "objective correlative" presupposes something similar to magic: given the proper presentation of "external facts" an emotion must be evoked. Winters' "intellectual 'correlations'" presupposes thought based on external facts in which emotion may be implicit.

In the former, the poet is simply passive, a so-called "shred of platinum" that stores up emotions, remains neutral towards them, and discharges a new compound.[73] In the latter, the poet must form some idea of how to present a definite relationship between a sense perception and emotion and thought. Provided the poet is not being intentionally or unintentionally obscure, the presentation of his thoughts should deepen our

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[72] T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Selected Essays (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1966) 18.

[73] Selected Essays 18-19.

understanding of his sense perception. Finding thought that closely corresponds to a sensory experience is difficult, but the "anti-image" does allow for more complex poetry than the "image"'s impressionism or nearly pure objectivism.

But both the "image" and "anti-image" are very limited. The "image" lacks the depth of a simile, metaphor, or even a traditional image.[74] The "anti-image" presupposes a "conceiving" mind, but one that is limited to the particular. Neither the "image" nor the "anti-image" allow for the poet's moral judgement or his ability to distinguish thought, or even himself, from the material world because the poet is merged with his object of description. It is not suprising that Winters later dismissed the essay as "essentially worthless."[75] As limited and mystical as his theories are at times, however, Winters does not contradict Imagist theory in "The Testament of a Stone." He simply develops a method by which absractions can be subordinated to sense perception and emotion: he fulfills the demand to "go in fear of abstractions."

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[74] J. V. Cunningham offers an excellent definition of the traditional image: "a descriptive phrase that invites the reader to project a sensory construction" ("Logic and Lyric," Collected Essays (Chicago: The Swallow Press, 1976) 167.

[75] Defense of Winters 102.

V. The Bare Hills

Winters' third volume, The Bare Hills (1927), contains a wide range of experimental verse on which, with the first third of The Proof, Winters' reputation as an experimental poet rested.[76] Winters' theoretical innovations found in "A Testament of a Stone," however, especially his version of the "image" and "anti-image," rarely occur in this volume. As I have argued, both are very limited in their usefulness and limiting to the poet. But the the terms are useful for examining his development and exploration of the Imagist technique. Objective description, whether for its own sake or as a context for subjective experience, is more developed than in the previous two volumes. Yet even very good objective description alone is insufficient. An undue emphasis on sense perception tends to subordinate the "conceiving mind. Grosvenor Powell effectively summarizes the basis of the problem: "Images are experienced through the sensibility; they are not judged."[77] Winters does, however, judge the adequacy of sensation as a means for poetry, and sometimes finds it lacking. His technique remains primarily Imagist, but he begins to go in fear of sensation rather than abstraction.

But let us first examine his objective treatment of the subhuman realm. One still finds poems that are pure description,

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76 Defense of Winters 60.
77 Language as Being 97.

such as "Tewa Spring":

> Red spring
> In deep valleys
>
> The peachtree
> Lies in shadow
> Deep as stone
>
> The river
> Is unheard

The poem describes very early spring: the river's ice has not yet broken. The lack of punctuation in the poem gives a vague sense of capturing a moment of process. This momentary perception is not invested with much significance for man; it is simply presented. Momentary perceptions can, however, be suggestive, as in "April":

> The little goat
> crops
> new grass lying down
> leaps up eight inches
> into air and
> lands on four feet.
> Not a tremor--
> solid in the
> spring and serious
> he walks away.

The first six lines describe the physical movement of the goat, and by themselves are similar to William Carlos Williams' "Poem" which simply describes a cat climbing over a jamcloset. In Winters, however, one rarely finds the "simplemindedness of 'The Red Wheelbarrow'"[78] or "Poem." The final four lines of "April" still describe the goat's movement, but they also suggest something about the difference between man and the animal

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78 Rhetoric of Artifice 235.

kingdom. The goat seems to leap joyously at the prospect of spring, but in fact he is unmoved, "solid" and "serious." His response is a clearly defined physical movement: an eight inch leap. Man tends to have less easily defined, visceral responses of joy to spring. Literature and myth recount this tendencey in man. For example, the joy one feels at the arrival of spring is comparable to the joy a mother feels at the return of her daughter in the Demeter and Persephone myth. In contrast, a goat may be physically contented with spring's abundance of food and, if mature, the prospect of mating, but spring for a goat is not an emotional matter. The goat's seriousness is attractive, but he is ignorant of the human experience of spring.

Winters' descriptive passages in this volume often form the basis for a distinction between man and the natural world. "Moonrise" offers a very good example:

> The branches,
> jointed, pointing
> up and out, shine
> out like brass.
>
> Upon the heavy
> lip of earth
> the dog
>
> at
> moments is
> possessed and screams:
>
> The rising moon draws
> up his blood and hair.

The moon is a public symbol often used in poetry to represent love, reason, or imagination; the moon is also associated with lunacy and the terrestrial realm. But here the concern is to

distinguish the appearence of moonlight for man from that for an animal. The effect of moonlight on trees can be described by the speaker, but its effect on the dog is out of the speaker's grasp. The moon's effect on the dog seems like possession, but its most apparent effect is physical and emotional: it excites and, perhaps, irritates the dog. One cannot, however, be certain of the cause of that effect. One can only understand it as something else, like demonic possession. Perhaps Winters had at this time a tacit understanding of the Aquinan sense of demonic beings as incomplete.[79] Howling at the moon is particular to the canine species, and one would have to merge with a member of that species and become a lesser being to fully understand it. The attraction to understanding this kind of irrational phenomena is, in the Aquinan sense, demonic. Winters' concern in this volume, however, is not to immerse himself in this kind of phenomenon, though he is concerned with the implications of immersion. He wants to distinguish himself from the natural world, whether that distinction is based on what man uniquely possesses, as in "April," or what he does not possess, as in "Moonrise." In both poems, however, he does not explicitly conclude anything from

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[79] According to Terry Comitio, "Winters [in his later career] was fond of citing Aquinas' observation that an entity is demonic 'in so far as his existence is incomplete'" (Defense of Winters, 17). Animals and natural phenomena are "incomplete" because they lack the rational powers and sophisticated emotions of man. In this way, the natural world represents a privation of being and is demonic, though, of course, it does not form evil intentions. It is man's desire to be a lesser being by denying his reason and complex emotions that constitutes a movement towards greater incompleteness.

that distinction. His thoughts are implicit; they do not transcend the particular on which they are based. In this way, he is limited by the particular, held by its demonic attractiveness. Let us keep this demonic attractiveness of the particular in mind as we move now to the Imagist technique of The Bare Hills and then to the ideas which underly it.

First, let us examine Winters' use of the "image" in order to establish its limits. His definition of the "image," as well as "the ontology of imagism," depended on the physical abiltiy of the poet to "perceive" the "poetic fact."[80] That is, the Imagist movement presupposed poets with intense sensibilities. For Winters, when two intense perceptions are fused, when they are the "same (my emphasis) at one point," they form an "image."[81] Instances of Winters' "image" are rare[82], and I think only one example, from "Upper Meadows," conforms to his definition:

> The harvest falls
> Throughout the valleys
> With a sound
> Of fire in leaves. (1-4)

The passage "fuses" the sound of a falling harvest, most likely fruit falling on dead leaves, and the sound of burning leaves. The observations are the "same at one point" because both involve

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80 John T. Gage makes this claim for the Imagist movement and I think it is also true of Winters (In the Arresting Eye 40).

81 Uncollected Essays 200.

82 Winters' theories, like those of many other Imagists, have limited usefulness in the actual practice of verse.

disintegrating leaves, making the same crackling sound. Winters suggests the quality of "crackling" without actually using the word, so he avoids a commonplace expression. Another instance of the "image," in "Crystal Sun," is somewhat different: "I [when a boy] screamed in sunrise/ As the mare spun" (7-8). The speaker's surprise is not distinct from the sunrise he witnesses.[83] Here Winters simply replaces the expected word, "surprise," with a similar sounding word, "sunrise," that indicates the phenomenon that the boy is surprised at. A boy may think that his surprise and the sunrise can be the "same at one point," but of course they are not and the "fusion" does not bear much scrutiny. Both passages have a limited success, but they do not give as great a sense of the poet's creative mind as a sophisticated comparison does.

The "image" is often not a Wintersian "image" at all, but simply a simile without the expected connective, as in "The Grosbeaks":

> They leap into
> the air and
> gather,
> the blown chaff of
> stony ground, and
> so are gone. (13-18).

Here we do not find a "fusion." The flying grosbeaks and the blowing chaff are not the same at a particular point. What one does find is an extended comparison without the expected word "like" in line 16. Grosbeaks are yellow and grey, like chaff,

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[83] Defense of Winters 61.

and in a group their colour would resemble a cloud of chaff. They do not fly in an orderly formation, so their movement would resemble a chaff cloud's movement. The comparison gives us a very good understanding of the appearence and movement of grosbeaks because birds are essentially different from chaff clouds and they only resemble each other in specific ways. The speaker also notes that man is essentially different from the grosbeaks. The birds' beauty is "clean as scattered seed," whereas men "lengthen/ into wrinkles" (4, 10-11). Here Winters notes a new distinction between man and the animal kingdom: birds, unlike men, do not appear to age; this distinction suggests the bird's unconsciousness of mortality. The simile, and the descriptions which implicitly distinguish man from the natural world do not, however, develop the idea of man's consciousness of mortality to a great extent. The poet is not necessarily fused with his object of description, but he is limited by its narrow context for thought.

As Grosvenor Powell has noted: "Imagism, as a technique, requires an attitude of receptivity. Images are experienced through the sensibility; they are not judged."[84] Simply to present sense perception does not imply a judgement, except insofar as the poet chooses a sense perception that is "perpetually startling." Often, however, the tendency in Imagism is to attach a subjective experience to a particular perception. As we have seen in some of Winters' poetry, that subjective

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84 Language as Being 97.

experience is a thought that is closely related to the particular; poems of this kind can be somewhat complex. Yet the sense perception itself has little inherent value; the poet's ability to conceive is limited to the particular. A thought given a context in sense perception only implies a limited judgement, an association. Winters places great value on the particular, but the particular can only be assigned value by an antecedent mind. The movement of the Imagist poem, however, only presupposes an antecedent sensibility.

At times, however, sense perception is not adequate as a context for the thoughts it gives rise to; the poet must transcend his sense perception. "Jose's Country" is a good example:

> A pale horse,
> Mane of flowery dust
> Runs too far for a sound
> To cross the river
>
> Afternoon,
> Swept by far hooves
> That gleam
> Like slow fruit
> Falling
> In the haze
> Of pondered vision (1-11)

Kenneth Fields claims that the first four lines have a "hallucinatory feeling" owing to a "separation of the visual perception, which is lovely, from the audible."[85] These lines are lovely, describing a striking and unusual phenomenon. But this public phenomenon acts as a metaphor to describe the passage

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85 Rhetoric of Artifice 235-36.

of time. Just as the horse's motion is regular, silent, and without thought, so too is the movement of time. But we understand time as more than simply motion; it has an aging effect on us, "a perpetual 'flaking away.'"[86] One can have a "pondered vision" of the effect of time by contemplating ripened fruit. But the aging effect of time in this case, as with man, is slow and one cannot see its passage, just as one cannot actually see fruit ripen or an hour hand move. Afternoon falls, but it falls differently depending on whether one is "seeing" its passage, as in the silent motion of the horse, or pondering the less clear, hazy process of its effects, as in the ripened fruit.

But the speaker's "pondered vision" is inadequate: "It is nothing" (12). He cannot "fuse" time with anything else; as Winters states in "Quod Tegit Omnia," time "assumes its own proportions" and has "an excellence at which one/ sighs" (19, 21-22). He does base his understanding of time in natural phenomena that suggest public ideas: time as motion and as aging. Yet he is not satisfied with his metaphor. The speaker's "pondered vision" is also more mundanely "nothing" because fruit does not fall in Jose's desert. In the final lines he returns to the desert setting and to the true nature of time, which can only be expressed in an abstract thought:

> Afternoon
> Beyond a child's thought,
> Where a falling stone
> Would raise pale earth,
> A fern ascending. (13-17)

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86 Defense of Winters 78.

Afternoon is beyond comparison, beyond the "child's thought" that serves as a quite sophisticated metaphor used for it. Afternoon seems ephemeral, like dust raised by a falling stone, which not only resembles the appearence of fern, but also its short life-span. But time stays, only we pass. We can fully understand its effects, but not its essence. Time is perfect in the sense that it remains unaffected and abstract, whereas everything else, animate or inanimate, suffers from its effects. The dissimilarity between the apparent fleetingness of time and the real transience of physical existence makes for a complex metaphor that implies its own inadequacy.

Before leaving "Jose's Country," however, one should first examine how Winters is able to achieve such complexity in the Imagist style. The poem opens with an image, not a Poundian or a Wintersian one, but one of good solid description. What follows can be understood as an "anti-image." The speaker establishes a correlation between an observation and a thought about the passage of time. The falling hooves are associated with falling fruit; time as motion is associated with time as aging. The process of ripening fruit cannot actually be seen in the way a running horse can; it is a hazier vision. Sense perception provides a context for thought, but in the final line this principle is reversed. The speaker implies that time is better defined as above sense perception; this thought provides a context for his final image. He implies that sense perception alone is inadequate for describing the true nature of time.

Therefore, the "conceiving" speaker is not here limited to the particular. He enters a supersensual realm in which he must define himself against an abstract idea, rather than an observation; however, he is still limited by the principle of presenting "an instant of time." We find a controlled series of associated momentary sense and thought perceptions, rather than discusive thought.

A similar organizing principle informs the more sophisticated "Quod Tegit Omnia." The first three lines present an image of spring:

> Earth darkens and is beaded
> with a sweat of bushes and
> the bear comes forth. (1-3)

The next six lines can be understood as an "anti-image." The bear entering spring provides a context for the idea of the mind entering the world "as it first becomes manifest to us--pure fact without meaning."[87] Both bear and man have a stored, but as yet, undefined energy. For the poet, his energy is an undefined passion:

> the mind, stored with
> magnificence, proceeds into
> the mystery of time, now
> certain of its choice of
> passion, but uncertain of the
> passion's end. (4-9)

The remaining lines examine the possibilities of "passion's end" in "the mystery of time": the appropriate subject matter and role for the poet. "Quod Tegit Omnia" is primarily a poem about

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87 Kenneth Fields, "Forms of the Mind: The Experimental Poems of Yvor Winters," Southern Review 17 (1981): 966.

poetry, but it is also a poem about how one perceives the world.[88] Winters is no longer satisfied with only recording sensation. His concern is for its value in a world in which, as the title suggests, everything changes. More generally, his concern is for how one can adequately define experience. As Kenneth Fields notes, Winters cannot help but use abstract language to achieve this end, even though he still writes in the Imagist mode:

> In the language of this poem, firm and poised though it is, one senses what must have seemed to Winters the increasing inadequacy of the imagist mode. The structure is still basically associative but the beautifully realized images continually spill over into abstraction.[89]

There is at least an implicit recognition of the value of abstraction in the poem.

Pure abstraction, however, denies sensory experience and therefore does not adequately represent the whole of human experience for the poet:

> When
> Plato temporizes on the nature
> of the plumage of the soul the
> wind hums in the feathers as
> across a cord impeccable in
> tautness but of no mind. (10-15)

Kenneth Fields summarizes Winters' treatment of Plato as follows: "Plato's temporizations upon the soul are precise but like 'a cord impeccable in/ tautness but of no mind.'"[90] Terry Comito

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[88] Kenneth Fields makes a similar point in The Rhetoric of Artifice (242).
[89] "Forms of the Mind" 966.
[90] Rhetoric of Artifice 240.

claims: "Plato's visionary abstractions, Winters wrote in 'Quod Tegit Omnia,' are 'impeccable in/ tautness but of no mind.'"[91] Abstractions, however, cannot really be said to be of no mind, though they may not take into account experiences which affect the mind, such as emotion and sensation. Moreover, neither critic examines what Winters means by Plato's temporizing on the "plumage of the soul." Plumage is a metaphor for the outer covering of the soul, the body. "Temporize" can mean either to comply or to procrastinate. In emphasizing the reality of the conceptual realm, Plato does not comply with the body, he does not come to terms with the value of the body's sensory experience. Let us briefly examine a summary of Plato's theory of knowledge to better understand these lines. For Plato, knowledge is not sense perception:

> [Sensible particulars] come into being and pass away, they are indefinite in number, cannot be grasped in definition and cannot become the objects of scientific knowledge. But Plato does not draw the conclusion that there are no objects of true knowledge, but only that sensible particulars cannot be the objects sought. The object of true knowledge must be stable and abiding, fixed, capable of being grasped in clear and scientific definition, which is of the "universal," as Socrates saw. The consideration of different states of mind is thus indissolubly bound up with the consideration of the different objects of those states of mind.[92]

Yet "it was one of Plato's standing difficultites to determine the precise relation between the particular and the universal."[93]

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91 Defense of Winters 11.

92 Frederick Copleston, A History of Philosophy (Toronto: Doubleday, 1985) 149-50.

93 A History of Philosophy 151.

In a different context, and much later in his career, Winters explains the problem presented by too strong an emphasis on abstraction in poetry: "We are also sensory animals, and we live in a physical universe, and if we are blind to the impressiveness and meanings of our physical surroundings, we are limited."[94] Plato is not blind to sensory percpetion, but he does not decide precisely how it informs thought. Sense perception is not durable, yet it is always present when one is conscious. But for Plato, it simply hums across the body as if across a perfectly tight cord. A cord, if perfectly tight, would not move in the wind and its humming effect would be very limited, just as the self-contained perfection of Plato's "visionary abstractions" allow very little for the effect of, and have very little "mind" for, sensory perception.

Indeed, thought separated from the possibility of sensory perception cannot be fully articulated by the poet:

> Time,
> the sine-pondere, most
> imperturbable of elements,
> assumes its own proportions
> silently, of its own properties--
> an excellence at which one
> sighs. (16-22)

We understand the experience of time as an effect because we are mortal, but time itself is wholly abstract; it is the "sine-pondere" (what is without weight or consequence).[95] It is

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[94] Yvor Winters, "Poetic Styles, Old and New," Four Poets on Poetry, ed. Don Cameron Allen (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1959) 70-71.

[95] Defense of Winters 74.

indifferent in its impeturbableness, and perfect in and of itself in assuming its own proportions "of its own properties." Our complete grasp of it, however, is tacit. It is an emotionally charged idea that cannot be fully articulated. The poet can only "sigh" at its excellence.

The role of the poet, however, is to articulate in the medium of time:

> Adventurer in
> living fact, the poet
> mounts into the spring,
> upon his tongue the taste of
> air becoming body: is
> embedded in this crystalline
> precipitate of time. (ll. 22-28)

The poet's realm must be animate, not abstract, reality; his articulation must give a sense of palpable form to experience: "upon his tongue the taste of/ air becoming body." As a metaphor for articulation, Winters uses a particular kind of chemical reaction. Certain liquids, when mixed together, form a solid, a precipitate. The poet chrystalizes an instant in the poem, and, being fused with his object, he too is embedded in that moment. At this stage articulation for Winters is still primarily based on the immediacy of sense perception in which the poet immerses himself. Giving form to experience is an act of control over one's world, and in "Quod Tegit Omnia" the experience is highly valued and "very moving."[96] Yet what underlies this experience is an act of "receiving": merging the self with the particular.

As Terry Comito notes, the poet's "immersion in pure

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96 Rhetoric of Artifice 240.

experience is finally pure solipsism."[97] He does not achieve "the kind of permanence that would chart his path through the world, but a stasis that locks him away from it."[98] If the mind does not transcend the material world, then it is not distinct from it. In a poem like "Alone," the speaker views his mind as part of the non-human realm: "My brain is a thousand bees" (9). Much of Winters' early poetry is not this extreme, yet even in the poems where the mind is just subordinated to sensory perception, the poet's control is very limited. The mind is informed by circumstance, but it does not rise above it, and in this sense, is not strongly distinct from its object. The "intensely realized particular,"[99] even if it is correlated to thought, is unique, but unrepeatable, and limited in its contribution to "the intercourse between things and the human meanings and intentions through which they become familiar."[100]

More mundanely, the significance of the particular is not always apparent:

> Moonlight on stubbleshining hills
> whirls down upon me finer than geometry
> and at my very
> face it blurs and softens like a dream. (1-4)

The very good image of the moonlight shinning on stems of grain is finer than geometry because it is concrete, not abstract. For

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97 Defense of Winters 182.
98 Defense of Winters 182.
99 "Forms of the Mind" 967.
100 Defense of Winters 183.

the speaker of "Nocturne," however, the scene's precision blurs the moment it begins to pass from sense-perception to thought-perception, at his "very face." It is a lovely scene, but little more. What follows in this poem is a series of unconnected images whose significance is not clear. Winters later stated that if the poem "were regarded as a true portrait of a state of mind, it would indicate madness on the part of the author."[101]

Winters was aware of his "madness" at this time, and it is sometimes the subject of his poetry. "Genesis" compares a door to the Roman God Janus, a god of doorways and of beginnings in general[102]:

> The door became a species of mystery.
>
> It opened inward or stood closed.
>
> It was the twofaced god that was able to learn
> nothing, save its own reversible path.

I think this poem can be understood in the context of the value of sense-perception. Janus and the door, like sense perception, offer "receiving," or nothing. One can allow the particular to invade, or not. In the absence of an antecedent mind, which is what is presupposed in Imagist poetry, these are the only two possibilities. For the Imagists, sensory experience is of primary importance and it determines abstraction; without sensory experience, there can be no abstraction; the "conceiving" poet is severely limited.

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101 Cited from Defense of Winters 79.
102 J. E. Zimmerman, Dictionary of Classical Mythology (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1985) 142.

Winters explores the moral implications of an undue emphasis on sensory experince in the "The Cold." In order to present accurate observation, in Winters' early view, the poet must fuse with his object; in order to have a "cold eye for fact" he must not allow his "conceiving" mind to interefere. Sense perception has a limited significance that may inform thought, but not moral conduct. Its particularity offers no standard by which it can be judged. When the poet values his "cold eye for fact" over his intellectual and moral self, his existence is as limited and tenuous as the sensory experience itself:

> Frigidity, the hesitant
> uncurls its tentacles
> into a furry sun.
> The ice expands
> into an insecurity
> that should appal
> yet I remain
> astray in this
> oblivion, this
> inert labyrinth
> of sentences that
> dare not end. (ll. 1-12)

The coldness of the immersed poet is hesitant as it proceeds through intense moments. As the moment in which he is immersed passes, so too passes his consciousness. His consciousness (as well as his conscience) is "astray." The poem's record of the held moment is the only confirmation of the value of that moment and of the poet's existence.

That confirmation, however, requires thought, not immersion; Winters' implicit recognition of his dilemma provides the basis by which he was able to transcend the limitations of Imagism. As he later stated, abstractions are a fundamental element of human

experience:

> We are, of course, rational animals, and most of our thinking is done in abstractions . . . we have become familiar with abstractions and with their realtionships to daily experience--they can be used with emotional force as well as with intellectual.[103]

Winters adds that sensory experience should be embodied in our poetry with "no sacrifice to rational intelligence." But in his early poetry the rational intelligence is placed in the context of sensory experience and not allowed to enjoy the full range of human experience. By developing Imagist theory and poetry Winters was beginning to come to terms with its limitations, and one should note the beginnings of his break from Imagism. The Bare Hills, however, is still the work of an Imagist poet. The predominant technique is a series of associated images and "complexes." Yet the intention of the poems is at times fundamentally opposed to Imagist principles. In "Jose's Country" the sensory perception in "an instant of time" is not adequate for the thought it gives rise to. He often presents subjective experience in "an instant of time" as severely limiting or even annihilating thought. The "seriousness" with which Winters used the techniques of Imagism allowed him to understand its limitations and moral implications as well as its strengths. In the first third of The Proof, while remaining within the confines of Imagism, he probes even deeper, this time into Imagism's Romantic roots.

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103 "Poetic Styles" 70.

VI. The Proof and Later Poetry

The Proof (1930) consists of three sections, the first of which comprises the last free verse Winters wrote. In this section we see Winters beginning to think his way out of the inherent solipsism of his early poetry[104]; his "drawing back from the brink"[105] of immersion is more apparent than in The Bare Hills. We can understand his "drawing back" as an anti-Romantic stance within the confines of the Imagist mode.[106] The common

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104 Winters says that solipsism "stayed with me for some years; I had to think my way out of it." He goes on to say that there are traces of it even in his later poetry ("By Way of Clarification," Twentieth Century Literature 10 [1964, October]: 132.

105 Defense of Winters 97.

106 The Imagists as a whole disliked Romanticism, but they did not carefully define its flaws. For example, Pound labels Wordsworth a "stupid man" and a boring poet, but does not sufficiently justify his claims (Ezra Pound, "Landor," Selected Prose 1909-1965, ed. William Cookson [London: Faber and Faber, 1973] 354). In an article written in the same year as The Proof, 1930, Winters isolates the problem of Wordsworth's poetry as monism, in which "the romantic of the ecstatic-pantheist type denies life, yet goes on living" (Uncollected Essays 64). The monistic state in Romanticism and Imagism is a temporary one, however, lasting only as long as the particular is intensely realized: only as long as matter and mind are merged. The monistic state tends towards solipsism in that true reality only exists in the intensely realized particular of the poet's mind. In his mundane existence the poet is distinct from matter, but true reality still exists only in remembered intense moments; therefore, he is primarily a solipsist. Much later in his career Winters also commented on Wordsworth's descriptions of a beautiful, benevolent natural world as "the ultimate in sytlistic indolence" (Forms of Discovery, 168). For Winters, the passivity of the solipsistic attitude pervades the poet's style. Indeed, in examining the first section of The Proof one notes not only more accurate observation, but also an attempt to describe the complexities of man's relationship to the natural world.

Romantic notions of a beautiful, benevolent natural world are often undercut. The natural scene is sometimes ugly and hostile, even symbolically represented as demonic. In the poems that emphasize subjective experience, monism is increasingly seen as an act which violates one's being. Of course Winters did not come to hate the natural world or invest it with an evil intent. Rather, he aimed at greater accuracy in describing its difference from man by noting its lack of human qualities, its privation of being. More importantly, he explored what relationship with nature was possible: not Romantic communion, but intelligent co-existence. The first third of The Proof is still limited by the Imagist emphasis on sense perception, but this final limitation is overcome in the other two sections of the volume and his later poetry.

In the first section of The Proof we do not find nearly pure objective Imagist poetry. Indeed, the suggestive power of the objective experience implies not only a difference between man and the natural world but also a judgement of that difference. One way in which Winters draws back from the attractiveness of immersion is to describe accurately scenes in which he could not possibly want to immerse himself. In previous volumes the desert was barren, yet it was attractive. He tended to ignore the complexity and hostility of that environment. In "Incandescent Earth," a similar setting, perhaps a grassland, suggests precarious and hostile relationships:

> Hills red and brown
> and matted

springy with scruboak
the dust and sagesmell
heat
a stifling cloud
rose at the touch
leaves fell to ash

more heat beat from
the earth
than from the sun the
rock
was hot all night

the coral snakes
flowed
rolling over smoking rock
in sluggish agony
in search of sleep

The poem establishes distinctions among the vaious elements of nature; they are not "all one." Earth supports life, but the heat it absorbs irritates the snakes and dries out its plant life: "leaves fell to ash." In turn, the venemous coral snake and the sage are hostile to man. In "The Streets, from The Bare Hills, the speaker experienced a kind of ecstasy to be "on the/ mythical and smoky soil at last" (27-28). In "Incandescent Earth" we have the "smoky soil" and the trappings of myth in a kind of hell-like scene, but here the speaker would likely rather be off the "mythical and smoky soil." The poem is anti-Romantic in a number of ways. It describes a scene with which one would not want to commune; it emphasizes hostility rather than harmony; and it makes distinctions among the various elements within the scene. Moreover, it relies on traditional symbolism by suggesting a hell-like quality. Of course, simply describing smoky soil really presents a kind of comic book hell, and our understanding of that state is not significantly

deepened. What is important for our purposes is that the poem narrows the significance or the allusion to a certain hell-like quality of hostility, rather than suggesting a wide range of events and characters as in Pound's "In a Station at the Metro."

Public symbolism is also important in "Orange Tree":

> Hard, oily,
> sinuous,
> your trunk,
>
> black serpent,
> struggling
> with your weight of gold--
>
> great strength
> massed
> against Time,
>
> in angry pride
> you hold out
> lacquered life
>
> the classic leaf.

The description of the orange tree is very good; the qualities attributed to it, especially its sinuousness, are analogous to the "black serpent" of the second stanza. While the metaphor comparing the tree trunk to the snake strengthens the description of the tree, it also introduces the traditional iconography of Satan and thereby suggests the demonic quality of the natural world. Like Satan, the tree can look like a serpent; it is associated with worldly wealth, gold; it is proud; and it is subject to, but holds out against, time (though Satan was created immortal, he is subject to death at the Second Coming). Although Winters does not treat directly the demonic quality he finds in the orange tree, by mediating sense perception and

thought-perception with specific public symbolism he does avoid limiting himself strictly to particularity or private impression. The final line's "classic leaf," however, does offer direct treatment: it presents an ancient self-contained perfection that preserves life.

Persevering against hostile elements in nature is an admirable quality, as seen in "Wild Sunflower":

> Sunflower! gross of leaf and porous,
> gummy, raw,
> with unclean edges,
>
> fury
> of the broken but unbeaten
> earth, it leers
> beside our door! (1-7)

From such an opening, one would expect the speaker to rejoice in the beauty of the sunflower, or to invest it with human qualities, as in Blake's "Ah! Sunflower": "Ah! Sunflower, weary of time,/ Who countest the steps of the sun."[107] Romantic notions of the all-pervading beauty of nature, however, are undercut by the plant's "unclean edges." The delight is felt for the persevering quality of the sunflower:

> Hold fast
> to what you are, in spite of
> the wormseething loam,
> the boiling land. (11-14)

The speaker's admiration of the sunflower gives rise to sentimentalism when he asks it to give him "love, slow love" (15), but clearly this emotional response is inappropriate:

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[107] William Blake, "Ah! Sunflower," William Blake, ed. Michael Mason (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) 273.

But
fiercely this thing
grows, is hairy, is
unfinished at the edges. (19-21)

The sunflower does seem to have a demonic quality: it is described as a "fury" that "leers." Yet its "fierceness" and its ugliness are essential for the sunflower to "hold fast" to what it is.

Man too must "hold fast" to what he is, but defining how to do so was still a problem for Winters, though not for much longer. In "To the Painter Polelonema," seizing pure experience is what "one lives" for and it

. . . drives a
brain into the rock
and bursts the veins
with love--
of rock!

No sparrow
cracks these seeds

that no wind blows. (14-21)

The desire to immerse oneself in the particular is explicitly presented as violating the mind, yet love of the particular is overpowering. The painter immortalizes the natural scene, but, as we see in the final three lines of the passage, he also makes it non-fertile and static. The painting is an intensely realized momentary perception, the "seed" that "cannot be cracked by the discursive intellect."[108] Immersion allows one to present the self-contained moment, wrung "from gold air/ violent with odors" (3-4); however, in doing so man "holds fast" to what he is not.

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108 Defense of Winters 86.

This poem is dedicated to a specific person, but the same problem is found in poems that can be read in the context of Winters' own concerns.

In "Remembered Spring" the speaker notes the "limber margin" of spring in the frost line:

> I found that Spring
> in early March, six inches
> under ground. Soaked,
> swollen hard with water,
> violent with meaning! (15-19)

The sinking frost line is a transient moment, but attaining its "violent meaning" requires a violent act:

> Living beauty, eating with my eyes,
> by my eyes eaten! I burned into all,
> stained, staining, in three colours,
> hard with joy. (20-23)

Immersion seems like a feast bordering on gluttony. The speaker is not only invaded by the particular, but the particular is invaded by him. He both stains and is stained, mentally and morally. He joyfully becomes "hard" like his landscape, but at the expense of his rational intelligence: he is involved in a sub-rational, sensual feast; his eyes lead to his digestive system, not his mind. He is not able to say what the "violent meaning" of spring is. As in "Snow-Ghost," he can only "look both ways and wait." Like Janus of "Genesis," he can either "receive" or not; he cannot effectively "conceive" until he exerts some control over the particular.

Nevertheless, in the poems we have examined so far, we detect an implicit resistance to the attractiveness of the particular. Winters takes a clearly unromantic approach to

nature by describing its hostile, demonic qualities, though he does not ignore its complexity or admirable qualities. Monism, while still valued, is less attractive, violent, and morally tainted. We see in these poems that nature can be deceptive, though through no perversity of her own. The perversity is man's. Man must hold fast to what he is: a rational animal with sophisticated emotions. By reason he better defines not only himself but the natural world as well.

Indeed, true appreciation of nature is man's "hard . . . lot," as Winters says in his last free verse poem, "Simplex Munditiis." The poem opens imagistically:

> The goat nips yellow blossoms
> shaken loose from rain--
> with neck extended
> lifts a twiching flower
> high into wet air. (1-5)

The speaker's thoughts about man's relationship to the natural world follow:

> Hard
> humility the lot of man
> to crouch beside
> this creature in the dusk
> and hold the mind clear;
> to turn the sod,
> to face the sod beside his door
> to wound it as his own flesh. (5-12)

Domesticating animals and cultivating land are familiar, ancient ways by which man intelligently co-exists with nature. We are very close to, and dependent on, the natural world in this way; therefore, we tend to want to view animals, land, and ourselves from a monistic perspective as having the same qualities; however, it is our "hard . . . lot" to humble ourselves to

nature's distinctness from ourselves. In "The Rows of Cold Trees," from The Bare Hills, the speaker saw himself as among the blessed who have Latin names, animals. But here the speaker better understands his Latin name: Homo Sapien means "knowing man."

The speaker knows he cannot fully participate in the natural world:

> In the spring the blossoms
> drown the air with joy,
> the heart with sorrow. (13-15)

With its abundance of growth and sensory detail, we do tend to have a visceral response of joy to spring. But unlike most of the natural world, our instinctual response to spring lacks a strong purpose. For man, birth, mating, and death are not part of a seasonal cycle, nor can he base his conduct on just what he observes in natural cycles. The joy, as well as the sorrow, that accompanies spring may be shared by many people, but in the realm of public moral conduct, these emotional responses have little to offer and are better left private:

> One must think of this
> in quiet. One must
> bow his head and take
> with roughened hands
> sweet milk at dusk,
> the classic gift of earth. (16-21)

These final lines represent Winters' first developed poetic conclusion on man's relationship to the natural world. We see for the first time the "conceiving" speaker, in his use of imperatives, fully exerting himself against circumstance. Man must recognize his detachment from the natural world and suppress

his desire to transcend that detachment. Instead, he must receive with humility what it really does offer. He must direct his concern towards ancient methods of intelligent co-existence with the natural world, such as goat milking. Nature does, therefore, offer gifts, but not those of spiritual union.

What we find in "Simplex Munditiis" is mutualism rather than commensalism. In mutualism, both species benefit, as in goat tending. Man receives "sweet milk," the domesticated goat receives a less arduous existence. In commensalism one species benefits, the other is unaffected. Winters' early poetry often implies that the intensely realized particular is a valuable experience for man. Of course, the animal or natural object is unaffected by the poet's desires. Yet these moments extinguish man's rational ability. They may be very moving, but they are private and offer little practical value in the public moral realm. In "Simplex Munditiis" the speaker comes to a moral conclusion, but he is still somewhat confined by the Imagist style. The syntactically closed image of the goat is the context for the speaker's thoughts and moral conclusion; while his conclusion has important moral implications, he does not rise to any great degree out of the context of the image's goat.

In a sonnet from The Proof, "The Castle of Thorns," Winters treats a similar subject in a style that allows him to define more clearly general moral issues. The second section's sonnets generally deal with many of the same concerns as do the first section's free verse poems, but these concerns are submitted to

the discipline of traditional form and a wider consciousness. In "The Castle of Thorns" the speaker again defines man against the natural world:

> Through autumn evening, water whirls thin blue,
> From iron to iron pail--old, lined, and pure;
> Beneath, the iron is indistinct, secure
> In revery that cannot reach you. (1-4)

The opening image is not syntactically closed as it would be in a typical Imagist poem. The clause that follows in lines 3-4 is not a passive, subjective response, but rather a judgement of the image. When the pail is filled with water it becomes less available to the senses, just as it becomes less available to thought when one tries to fill one's mind with its purity. Water is a metaphor for the opacity between mind and matter:

> Water it was that always lay between
> The mind of man and that harsh wall of thorn,
> Of stone impenetrable, where the horn
> Hung like the key to what it all might mean. (5-8)

This passage alludes to medieval romance in which,

> the Robber Knight commonly represents Death. In taking his victim to the castle, which is normally surrounded by a wood of thorn, he must in some way cross or dive under water, which is the most ancient symbol of the barrier between the two worlds.[109]

To attempt to immerse oneself in "stone impenetrable" or any other element of the natural world is an act of annihilation, a death of the rational consciousness, which is death itself.

The sonnet offers a form in which the problem presented in the octave can be answered in the sestet. The mundane action of watering goats is itself an assertion against death and the

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109 Collected Poems 189.

purity of the natural world. Goat tending offers co-existence with the natural world and acceptence of man's role in it:

> My goats step guardedly, with delicate
> Hard flanks and forest hair, unchanged and firm,
> A strong tradition that has not grown old.
> Peace to the lips that bend in intircate
> Old motions, that flinch not before their term!
> Peace to the heart that can accept this cold. (9-14)

The goats are as pure as the pail, and in a sense, being unconscious of mortality, they, as a species, do not age. They simply accept their lot, just as man must accept his. But man cannot rely on instinct. He must be consciously disciplined to live "intelligently and well"[110] in the face of the unknowable (which here is not just the natural world, but also matter, and death); he must not dismantle the self in an attempt to fathom it. As Terry Comito says, "For Winters, the greater heroism is learning how to go on living in the presence of the unknowable."[111]

Indeed, the poem itself is testament to the poet living intelligently and well. The sonnet form offers a stability and measuring of experience not available in free verse. Free verse's principle of continual change may be appropriate for a poet who understands the world as a continual flux, but it cannot

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110 Winters uses this phrase in his description of the subject of Thomas Hardy's poetry: "The tragic necessity of putting by the claims of the world without the abandonment of self-control, without loss of the ability to go on living, for the present, intelligently and well . . . is the subject of Thomas Hardy's poetry" (Defense of Reason 26). I think this passage also offers a very good description of the subject of Winters' mature poetry.

111 Defense of Winters 123.

manifest poetic control.[112] The unknowable is still present in "Castle of Thorns," but it is defined against form, as well as human understanding and practical experience. As Winters makes clear in his poem, man tacitly understands the natural world's impenetrability, but he cannot fully define it. He can only accept it and productively cooperate with it as far as he is able.

The particular perception and the particular itself are still important for Winters, but the Imagist principle is reversed by his making the emotionally charged idea the context for the particular. The subject of "The Castle of Thorns" is not a pail which gives rise to an idea. Rather, the subject is the acceptence of the unknowable as it manifests itself in particulars. In his final critical work, Forms of Discovery, Winters' offers a very good description of this relationship: "One improves one's understanding of the general by understanding the particular; one improves the particular by referring it to the general."[113] In Imagist poetry, one "goes in fear of" an understanding of the general; the particular is not often improved by "referring it to the general." Even when the particular perception provides a context for subjective

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[112] Often what is called free verse has a fairly regular rhythm; in poetry of this kind poetic control is apparent. Winters offers an extended discussion of the various forms of free verse in "The Scansion of Free Verse" (Defense of Reason 112-29).

[113] Forms of Discovery xiv.

experience, the particular's reference is limited to the emotions and thoughts it gives rise to. The fundamental problem of Imagism is that it depended too heavily on the limited significance of the particular, and did not refer to the general, practical experience of man. It rarely offered a sense of how one lives "intelligently and well."

For Pound, however, poetry provided the "data for ethics." This idea seems to come from Ford Madox Ford[114]: "[poetry is the] rendering of the material facts of life without comment and in exact language."[115] Yet the material facts alone are only material facts, and in themselves have little significance for man. The way in which the Imagists invested the material facts with significance was to advocate what amounts to an intense monism that allowed one to discern the exact nature of the material fact. As we see in Pound, the poet must strip himself of all save objective experience:

> I take it as the supreme reward for an artist . . . that the momentum of his art, the sheer bulk of its processes . . . should heave him out of himself, out of his personal limitations, out of the tangles of heredity and of environment, out of bias of early training, of early predilections . . . and leave him simply the great true recorder.[116]

As we have seen elsewhere, Pound valued emotional content in poetry. Yet if man is heaved out of everything that Pound would have him heaved out of, there is little room for emotion.

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114 In the Arresting Eye 136.
115 Cited from In the Arresting Eye 136.
116 Literary Essays 299-300.

Indeed, there is only room for the invasion of the particular when everything but receptivity is stripped away.

What Pound seems to be implying by the "great true recorder" is the objective study of subjective experience. Pound equates art and science: "The arts, literature, poesy, are a science, just as chemistry is a science. Their subject is man, mankind and the individual."[117] For Pound, poetry of this kind has a moral purpose because it determines "what kind of animal man is, [so that one] can contrive his maximum happiness."[118] Yet science is only concerned with sensory experience as it pertains to thought uninfluenced by emotion, culture, and history, whereas the study of man, if it aims at completeness, must consider a much wider range of experience--such things as science ignores and Pound would have "heaved out." Moreover, as Winters notes, the poet's use of language differs fundamentally from the scientist's:

> Poetry, as nearly as I can understand it, is a statement in words about a human experience, whether the experience be real or hypothetical, major or minor; but it is a statement of a particular kind. Words are symbols for concepts, and the philosopher or scientist endeavours as far as may be to use them with reference to nothing save their conceptual content. Most words, however, connote feelings and perceptions, and the poet, like the writer of imaginative prose, endeavors to use them with reference not only to their denotations but to their connotations as well. Such writers endeavor to communicate not only concepts, arranged presumably in rational order or in an order apprehensible by the rational mind, but the feeling or emotion which the rational content ought to arouse.[119]

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117 Literary Essays 42.
118 Literary Essays 41.
119 Yvor Winters, Function of Criticism, (Denver: Alan Swallow Press, 1957) 81-82.

The complete study of man lies in the relationship between denotation and connotation, thought and emotion. Both must be considered because both are essential components of man. Pound's "great true recorder" is incomplete because he ignores a large part of human experience. He is only concerned with heaving himself into the particular.

While Winters rejected the limiting monistic implications that underlay Imagism, he did not reject Imagist technique in his later poetry. Winters' later poetry and his shift to traditional forms is a major study in itself. As my area of study is the Imagist context of Winters' early poetry, especially his nature poetry, I will limit myself here to the ways in which he made use of Imagist techniques in his later poetry. Kenneth Fields makes the valid claim that Winters' greatest critical achievement is his description of the post-symbolist method[120], a method in which "it ought to be possible to embody our sensory experience in an efficient way, not as ornamanet, and with no sacrifice of rational intelligence."[121] As we have seen in his Imagist poetry the rational intelligence is usually sacrificed to intense perception. Imagism's failure was in denying the value of abstractions, especially as they pertain to experience. Imagism did, however, expand the poet's realm by emphasizing the value of sensory experience and accurate sense perception, and Winters was clearly indebted to the movement for this. Winters' Imagist

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120 Rhetoric of Artifice 274.
121 "Poetic Styles," p. 71.

years perhaps also inform his understanding and use of the post-symbolist method; the method does seem to offer what some of the Imagists strived for.

The post-symbolist method did not begin with Imagist theory, however; and the Imagists certainly did not practice it. Winters traces the method back to Emily Dickinson and finds that "in the best lines sense-perception and concept are simultaneous; there is neither ornament nor explanation, and neither is needed."[122] In discussing Wallace Stevens' poetry he adds that post-symbolist imagery is fundamental to the poem's organization: "Sensory detail is not ornament; it is a part of the essential theme."[123] In Pound's "one image poem," "In a Station at the Metro, one finds simultaneous sense and thought perception in the first line: "The apparition of these faces in the crowd." But the ambiguous use of "apparition" blurs the sense perception. In the "anti-image" of Winters' "Winter Echo" we found a sensory experience that suggested a metaphysical experience, but not precise sensory detail. As well, in both poems we do not find organized thought. The post-symbolist method can be understood as presenting a more complete perception than what is offered by Imagist principles. That is, the sensory description carries intellectual weight essential to the poem's theme.

Winters values highly both the senses and the intellect; only from a presentation of man's sensations, thought, and

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122 Forms of Discovery 270.
123 Forms of Discovery 276.

emotion can a complete judgement be made. Essentially, poetry must include a wide range of significant human experience:

> We regard as the greatest those works which deal with experiences which affect human life most profoundly, and this criterion is not merely one of the intensity of the experience but of the generality or inclusiveness of its implications.[124]

The post-symbolist method is sophisticated in that it does not subordinate sensations, thought, or judgement; therefore, it offers a great range of implications.

Let us examine a later poem that uses the post-symbolist method on subject matter found in one of Winters' Imagist poems. "The Manzanita," like "Orange Tree," describes a tree trunk:

> This is no shrub of some few years, but hard
> Its smooth unbending trunk, oh, hard and cold!
> Of earth and age the stony proof and guard! (6-8)

The trunk is the "stony proof" or manifest evidence of the ancient earth; it guards the forest floor and the tree's essential fluids. The description also carries the poet's thoughts about, and judgement of, the scene. As a "stony proof" and "guard" the trunk is an impervious barrier that the poet cannot enter. Having legitimized both sensation and conception, the speaker can then go on explicitly to judge nature in the context of his accurate observation and careful thought:

> This life is not our life; nor for our wit
> The sweetness of these shades; these are alone.
> There is no wisdom here; seek not for it!
> This is the shadow of the vast madrone. (13-16)

The speaker concludes that man is fundamentally distinct from the

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124 The Function of Criticism 27.

natural world. The poem does not, however, end in pure abstraction; the post-symbolist method is again used. The second line of the passage notes "the sweetness of these shades," meaning both the seductiveness of the shade's physical comfort and its shade-like, demonic quality. The final line refers both to the large shadow cast by the tree and the unmeaningful void cast by the natural object, a void in which the self can be lost. Much of what is expressed in "The Manzanita," is suggested in "Orange Tree"; however, only "The Manzanita" reaches a clear conclusion supported by sensory detail. The tree is impenetrable and shadowy, both in its appearence and in its opacity to the intellect of man. We have seen in Winters' early poetry that he was able to imply thought through objective description, but only in his later poetry does objective description contribute to a clearly defined moral theme.

The post-symbolist method provides both the precise objective description and the precise subjective description the Imagists strived for. Their tendency to "go in fear of abstractions" often produced nearly pure objective poetry. Yet Pound was not satisified with pure objectivism. His definition of the image emphasizes intellectual and emotional content, and he was harsh on those who "mistake the eye for the mind."[125] He established an organizing principle for the "one image poem" that gave the "complex" a context in sense perception. But he did not

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125 Cited from Glen Hughes, Imagism and Imagists: A Study in Modern Poetry (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1931) 60-61.

establish the significance of the "complex." The Imagists certainly had the basis for post-symbolist imagery in their emphasis on sensory detail's relationship to emotion and thought. One could almost view imagist poetry as a crude prototype of the post-symbolist method if it were not for the fact the method predates Imagist poetry; however, the Imagists' excessive emphasis on sensation and subordination of abstraction did not allow for the complexity of the post-symbolist method. Nevertheless, the value the Imagists placed on sensory detail likely informed Winters' description of the method, which post-dates the Imagist movement.

Perhaps Imagism's greatest contribution to Winters, and poetry in general, is its emphasis on accurate observation. Winters' later poetry contains many excellent images that at an earlier time in his career would have constituted poems in themselves. I will limit myself to what is, I think, his best image:

> From the ship we saw
> Gray whales for miles: the long sweep of the jaw,
> The blunt head plunging clean above the wave.
> And one rose in a tent of sea and gave
> A darkening shudder; water fell away;
> The whale stood shining, and then sank in spray.
> ("The Slow Pacific Swell," 23-28)

The description of the whale's movement is very precise, expressing the whale's awesome power and beauty. But the whale's movement and environment is also terrifying and alien. The passage suggests Melville's treatment of the sea and whales as

representations of chaos and evil in Moby Dick.[126] For Winters in his later career, however, the suggestive image alone was no longer adequate for the basis of a poem. This second stanza of "The Slow Pacific Swell" describes a number of experiences the speaker has on the sea, the last of which is sighting the whales.

In the third stanza the speaker reaches a conclusion based on accurate observation and careful analysis of the alien nature of the sea:

> It [the land] stands beneath the feet, and one may come
> Walking securely, till the sea extends
> Its limber margin, and precision ends. (34-36)

Precision requires distance, a "drawing back." Just as the speaker does not attempt to merge with the whales, but instead, views them from a distance, he does not attempt to submerge himself in the chaos of the sea, but stops at its "limber margin." It is on this "limber margin" that the poet must tread. Sensory experience alone is transitory and offers no foothold for reason. Yet it does inform thought and experience; one must scrutinize it without giving oneself completely over to it. Poised in this way, Winters was able to present precise and valuable sensory detail as it pertains to experience without sacrificing the rational intelligence.

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126 See "Herman Melville and The Problems of Moral Navigation" in Defense of Reason for an extended discussion of symbolism in Moby Dick.

VII. Conclusion

For Winters, the end of Imagism came with his adoption of traditional English forms. The movement as a whole died because of its restrictions. The fundamental limitation of Imagism is that it went too far in subordinating thought to sensation. The result was literature based on the intensely realized perception captured from an ever-changing flux. The perception is unique, perhaps startling, but offers little more than a limited and superficial sense of wonder, and hence the end of Imagism. Imagism's earliest theorist, T. E. Hulme, inadvertently predicted the end of the movement in his discussion of "wonder":

> A literature of wonder must have an end . . . . Think of the lost ecstasy of the Elizabethans. "Oh my america, my new found land" . . . . Wonder can only be the attitude of a man passing from one stage to another, it can never be a permanently fixed thing.[127]

One can wonder at something in amazement, and this sense of "wonder" is transitory. After one's amazement has passed, however, one may be left with a different kind of wonder, a thoughtful wonder. Winters' early poems, with their startling perceptions, may strike us with amazement, but they allow for little thoughtful wonder. In adopting the post-symbolist method in his later poetry he achieved a true poetry of wonder that is both striking in its perceptions and profound in its emotion and thought.

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[127] T. E. Hulme, Speculations, ed. Herbert Read (New York: The Humanities Press, 1965) 140.

In examining Winters' early career, we note this movement towards more thoughtful wonder without sacrifice to the wonder provided by sensory detail. Throughout his career Winters valued sensory experience, but he eventually rejected it as the sole content for poetry. Even in the Immobile Wind's "Two Dramatic Interludes for Puppets" we see Winters examining the dangers of immersion and the inadequacies of the Imagist technique. In The Magpie's Shadow the dangers of immersion are not as apparent, and the mind exerts some control in observation that implies thought. But the poetry in this volume, concise as it is at times, is very limited. The intensely realized perceptions are invested with little significant value. In The Bare Hills, Winters begins to grapple directly with the precariousness of the immersed state as it informs not only poetry but also one's existence. Winters still holds valuable the intensely realized perception, especially in "Quod Tegit Omnia." But he also confirms the arbitrariness of experience he is elsewhere less certain of. In the first section of The Proof, the particular is unattractive; immersion in it is violent. In his final free verse poem, "Simplex Munditiis," we see, for the first time, restraint and moral action: restraint in drawing back from the brink of immersion; moral action in expressing the appropriate conduct in drawing back. The final step is to use traditional form as a means of exerting further control over experience, and this we see from the second section of The Proof onwards.

Winters' shift to traditional poetry is an essential context

for studying his early poetry. But one must not allow his later career to obscure the significance of his twenties' poetry. Winters himself considered his experimental poetry "very good of its kind, quite as good as any of the 'experimental' work of this century."[128] The sophistication we find in some of his early poetry certainly validates this claim. But, as Winters also makes clear, his early poetry is inferior to his later works.[129] The stylistic limitations we find in his early poetry illustrate the soundness of this judgement. Yet there are also strengths: precise and suggestive descriptive detail. His Imagist years allowed him to refine his objective descriptions and that refinement continued throughout his career. In these same years he also refined the suggestive power of sensory details, but only in his later career is their suggestive power developed into organized thought in the post-symbolist method.

Winters' description of the post-symbolist method is not only his greatest critical statement but also his best defence of twentieth century poetry. Poetry that can "embody sensory experience without sacrifice to the rational intelligence" considers a wider range of experience than previously found in poetry. While the Imagists overemphasized sensory experience, they certainly recognized it as valuable. Among the Imagists, however, only Winters was eventually able to clearly define its value by balancing it with the other two essential elements of

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128 Early Poems 7-8.
129 Early Poems 7.

poetry: emotion and thought.

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